Chapter 4

Spirituality and Entertainment

“There was the Revue in Asakusa, [actor and comedian] Enoken was here, France-za [present-day Engei Hall] was here. Because there were places like that, the scent of that popular entertainment of older eras still remain here.”

- Oshow

Prelude

*Bong, bong. *Sensō-ji’s bell is rung eight times at six a.m. every morning.¹ Its peal permeates Asakusa, but it has different meanings for the neighborhood’s diverse dwellers. It is an alarm clock for Nakagawa, a merchant whose apartment is located directly across the alley from the temple. It is a dreamy chime that the geisha Seiko usually does not hear; she goes to bed late after entertaining clients, and by the time the early-morning chime reaches her apartment in north Asakusa, they are soft and do not wake her. For Tanaka Hiroshi, the novice monk at Sensō-ji, the ringing is professional, personal, and ritualistic. As the eighth toll is sounded, he sets himself onto his cushion in the temple’s sanctuary and listens for the chief priest to signal the beginning of the morning ritual.

I. Spiritual Musiking in Asakusa

As discussed in Chapter 3, there are six tropes that collectively and interactively define Asakusa as a place. For any Asakusa dweller musiking at a specific time and location

¹ The temple bell is rung eight times each morning. Eight is an auspicious number in Buddhist philosophy: The Buddha’s principal teachings are expressed in the Noble Eightfold Path.
within the neighborhood, their musikscape is anchored by at least one of these tropes, which they activate for personal and communal reasons. A case in point is Tanaka of Sensō-ji, who carves out a spiritual musikscape inside the expansive and enveloping soundscape montage of Asakusa in which he lives, works, and prays. In his mid-20s, Tanaka is in many ways a typical young Japanese man. As of 2012, he had lived in Tokyo for about seven years, having moved there from northern Japan. Like many people his age, he is interested in popular culture and socializes with friends his own age throughout the city. In particular, he likes to listen to heavy metal music and follows American bands such as Slayer, Megadeth, Slash, and Anthrax, as well as the Finnish band Nightwish. Like many other young Japanese people, he is not particularly interested in traditional Japanese music or cultural traditions.

In one important way, however, he is no average young Tokyoite; he is a novice Buddhist monk at Sensō-ji. His serves as a disciple at one of the temple’s component monasteries in the northeast section of the precincts (marked with a red star in Map 5 below) and works for the temple’s Education and Outreach Department. As a monk who is still quite low in Sensō-ji’s organizational hierarchy, Tanaka works diligently to learn Buddhist teachings from the temple’s senior clergy members, to acquire the skills necessary to properly carry out Buddhist practice, and to fulfill his institutional and bureaucratic duties.

Tanaka spends the majority of his time within the grounds of Sensō-ji, and so his experience in Asakusa is structured significantly by the temple precinct’s physical layout.

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2 The monk whom I consulted asked that his true name not be used in my work, explaining that he preferred to remain anonymous in order to avoid potential conflict in the event that the opinions he expressed to me are inconsistent with the official views of Sensō-ji. “Tanaka” is, therefore, a pseudonym.
and its material relationship to its surroundings. For instance, as he explained, Sensō-ji’s design is unique in certain respects. Unlike many Buddhist temples in Japan, Sensō-ji has no exterior barrier, making its precinct uncommonly accessible and welcoming. In a similarly unrestricted fashion, the nave of Sensō-ji’s Main Hall is open to the public from six a.m. to seven p.m. every day. As a result, tourists, locals, and lay members of its congregation casually pass through the grounds with ease, gather to participate in its festival events, and enter the Main Hall during its daytime open hours.

Some parts of the temple are not so accessible, however. There are signs asking the public to refrain from entering the alleyways around Sensō-ji’s component monasteries where Tanaka and the rest of the clergy live and spend some of their time in study and prayer. Nevertheless, he encounters lay visitors daily when he goes to work at the temple office located next to the pagoda, when he acts as an official photographer during regular
festival events, and when he attends the twice-daily rituals (gongyō) in the Main Hall. These rituals take place in a sanctuary that, just like the monks’ quarters, is not open to the public, and temple employees prevent general access by guarding its entryway. However, it is only separated from the open nave by a metal screen, and so the actions of the rituals do not take place in physical or sonic isolation. There are always visitors praying and sightseeing just feet away, ranging from relatively few during early morning services, to up to hundreds during afternoon services. Due to these physical realities and their sonic
repercussions, Tanaka understands Sensō-ji as not only a place to pray, but also an open and often vibrant pedestrian square where colorful spiritual festivals are often held, and through which lay visitors and passersby traverse and congregate freely.

The geographical and sonic realities of Sensō-ji and the rest of Asakusa are concrete matters that physically exist outside of Tanaka's mind. However, Tanaka has come to the neighborhood to serve as a monk at the temple, and he encounters the spaces and sounds throughout Asakusa in his own way, interpreting and interacting with them according to his spiritual perspectives and priorities. In doing so, he uses his individual agency to fashion a musikscape for himself that fulfills those personal priorities, provides him with a sense of emplacement that is meaningful for him, and allows him to carry out his life as a novice monk. Like all humans’ perception of sound and place, Tanaka’s musikscape is not static but is instead a cognitive and musical construction that changes with time, activity, and attention. At certain moments, his spiritual musikscape in Asakusa might be tightly focused, centered exclusively on the sounds of a religious ritual in progress, providing him a compact sense of place within the sacred sanctuary of Sensō-ji. At other times, it expands to include a greater array of sounds from throughout the neighborhood, enabling a feeling of emplacement in the wider district of Asakusa. Nevertheless, Tanaka’s experience of sound in the neighborhood overall remains centered upon Sensō-ji and the spiritual activities that resound there.

Below I describe a series of scenes from Tanaka’s spiritual musikscape, which I label Sonic Scenes 1, 2, and 3. Sonic Scene 1 is the most focused and incorporates his experience while participating in a morning ritual at Sensō-ji. Sonic Scene 2 is a bit broader, taking into account his experience during afternoon rituals there. Sonic Scene 3 zooms out even
further to include his musikscape of larger Asakusa. After presenting these three Sonic Scenes of Tanaka’s spiritual musikscape in the neighborhood, I will go on to analyze them with reference to his musiking practice, the nature of his agency, his relationships to Asakusa’s cultural tropes, the diverse range of sounds he encounters there, and finally his changeable sense of place that arises from these factors.

**Sonic Scene 1:**

*Tanaka’s Spiritual Musikscape During Morning Rituals*

On days when Tanaka participates in the morning ritual inside Sensō-ji’s Main Hall, his spiritual musikscape is relatively narrow. It comes alive with the particular sounds created within the limited sphere of space, sonic resonance, and social meanings of the temple’s sanctuary. During one such ritual, the chief priest sits at the foot of the altar from where he strikes a *kei* (small, hanging, fish-mouthed gong made of bronze), producing the sonic signal to begin each segment of the ceremony. The gathered clergy seated behind him collectively voice the *shōmyō* (Buddhist chanted holy texts and invocations) that are the basis of the ritual at Sensō-ji. Only a few feet away in the temple nave, a lay visitor gently shakes a metal *omikuji* can to retrieve her fortune. A couple of others throw coins that jangle into the massive collection box and press their hands together in momentary prayer to the Bodhisattva Kannon—“*Kyō mo onegai shimasu* [Please [bless me] again today]”—before returning to earthly conversations or moving on to their quotidian tasks. The distant bark of a dog outside on the pavement rings weakly through the open doors.

In this relative calm of the early morning, Tanaka responds to the sound of the *kei* and the words of the prayers flowing from his lips. He effortlessly concentrates on the meaningful sounds of the ritual, maintaining his focused sense of presence inside the
temple sanctuary. As one chant ends, the chief priest strikes the *kei* again. Tanaka hears it and knows that the priest is about to chant the opening line of the Kannon Sutra: “Myō-hō Ren-ge-Kyō Kan-ze-on Bo-satsu Fu-mon-bon Dai-ni-jū-go.”³ At the end of this introduction, Tanaka, along with a small group of participating monks, starts to chant the main body of the sutra along with the chief priest. Their voices fill the space of the sanctuary as another monk begins to beat a pulse on the *chū-daiko* (medium-sized drum) in the adjacent chamber. They continue the chant and match their pace with the pulse of the drum, which accelerates gradually and steadies at a brisk tempo. The reverberations of the drumbeat pulsate around Tanaka and through the sanctuary, easily drowning out the visitors in the nave, and resonate into the still-quiet square beyond.

**Sonic Scene 2:**

*Tanaka’s Spiritual Musikscape During Afternoon Rituals*

In the daily afternoon ritual, the liturgy is conducted with some important changes. Like the morning ritual, it is performed to call upon Kannon to show people mercy and to engage in meditative practice for cultivating mindfulness. The Kannon Sutra is again the climax of the ceremony, but it is preceded by different hymns and sacred texts. It is also more likely that a number of lay congregation members join the monks inside the sanctuary. Most of them sit quietly for the greater part of the ritual, but join in the chanting of the Kannon Sutra along with the monks at the appropriate point in the ceremony.

Although these changes inevitably alter Tanaka’s musikscape somewhat from the morning ceremony, the activity beyond the sanctuary compels him to expand his spiritual musikscape to incorporate a greater physical/sonic sphere. In the bustling Asakusa

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³ The opening line of the Kannon Sutra, which translates as “Twenty-fifth chapter of the Lotus Sutra, the sutra of the Bodhisattva Kannon.”
afternoon, the monks enact their ritual sounds amid a din of dozens—sometimes hundreds—of tourists and pious visitors milling about the open nave. There is the constant rattle of offertory coins, clatter of omikuji cans, and shouts of countless voices that echo through the temple as the monks chant their melodic hymns. Sound flows through the metal screen that separates the nave from the inner sanctuary. Tanaka inevitably hears all of these sounds. He cannot help but be aware of the way the temple building resonates with the activities of boisterous tourists and visitors, and he must make greater effort to focus on the spiritual sounds of the ritual. In this noisy environment, those ritual sounds only weakly filter out into the nave, until the pounding of the chū-daiko again fills the temple building and carries beyond into the swarm of tourists and townspeople in the crowded temple square.

**Sonic Scene 3:**
*Tanaka's Spiritual Musikscape in the Temple Precincts and Beyond*

Outside of his direct involvement in the daily rituals in the temple’s Main Hall, Tanaka spends the vast majority of his time at various other sites within Sensō-ji’s precincts, praying in his monastery, working in the temple office, or photographing festivals. He does not often explore the neighborhood outside of the temple. Indeed, it is rare to see Sensō-ji’s clergy spending time in secular spaces in Asakusa. However, many of the neighborhood’s diverse sounding activities are evident to Tanaka from his position at the temple. He passes through temple spaces that are open to the public on a daily basis, where the dense urban life of Asakusa is inescapable. And on days when Tanaka is asked to take official photographs at Sensō-ji’s various events, his spiritual musikscape comes alive with diverse sounds and meanings, both from within the temple’s purview and from the
secular world beyond. Many sounds converge in the temple’s territory that he must navigate in order to carry out his task.

When he photographs the annual Kinryū no Mai (The Golden Dragon Dance, an event commemorating a mythical story from Sensō-ji’s history, described in more detail below on pages 189-191), he hears the local geisha playing music in the festival ensemble (hayashi). Their sound fills the main plaza as volunteer puppet masters make a metal golden dragon dance through Sensō-ji’s precincts. At the same time, the shouts of revelers at Hanayashiki carry unimpeded into the temple yard. Nearby, a monkey trainer is striking a small drum and calling out commands to his simian charge. Shopkeepers at the dozens of yatai (carts) set up throughout the temple grounds hawk their wares, loudly urging passersby to try some okonomiyaki (savory pancakes) or tori no karaage (fried chicken). The chatter of tourists and locals—who can number in the thousands, and even millions at the neighborhood’s largest events—fill the precinct. Not far outside of the temple grounds,
Asakusa’s restaurants and shops have higher than average sales and performance venues enjoy larger audiences as festivalgoers permeate the neighborhood and take advantage of its many secular attractions.

Amid all of this, the diligent Tanaka is focused on the action of the temple’s spiritual event, the performance of Kinryū no Mai, that is the subject of his official photographs. He works earnestly, wanting to earn respect and approval from the senior clergy. He has little extra energy or attention to spend pondering the inner workings of the festival music, pining for a ride on Hanayashiki’s roller coaster, watching a monkey show, or being tempted by tasty snacks. Focusing on his duties, Tanaka navigates the noisy festival crowd, following the movement of the dancers and musicians, hoping that his photographs will convey the vitality of the event and earn some praise from his supervisors.

Analysis

Tanaka has consciously chosen to be in Asakusa to serve as a Buddhist monk at Sensō-ji. He sees Sensō-ji as the heart of Asakusa, and his sonic experiences in the neighborhood are grounded in Asakusa’s trope of spirituality. He interacts with and experiences the temple and the neighborhood from his perspective as a novice Buddhist monk. He sees his basic duties there to be praying to the Bodhisattva Kannon, learning Buddhist practice from the more senior clergy at the temple, and fulfilling the practical duties assigned to him as a junior member of the monk community. He understands Sensō-ji as an institution formerly belonging to the Tendai Buddhist Sect, which is liturgically defined by the Lotus Sutra and its religious practices. Specifically, Sensō-ji belongs to an offshoot denomination, the Shō-Kannon Sect, which takes the chanting of Kannon Sutra as a

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fundamental practice. That sutra is, therefore, the central sound of the rituals at Sensō-ji, and of the monks’ spiritual practice in Asakusa.

i. The sound of shōmyō

Sound in general, but shōmyō in particular, is an important medium through which Tanaka and other pious people at Sensō-ji spiritually communicate with the bodhisattva. In fact, the name Kannon—or more accurately, the long form of her name, Kanzeon (観世音)—literally means “Perceiver of the Sounds of the World.” The text of the sutra relates that Kannon is a compassionate being who will rescue all living beings that call out her name. One important way that the monks do this is by performing shōmyō. The particular sounds of the Buddhist chant, and the theories and spiritual beliefs about those sounds, are central to Tanaka’s musiking in Asakusa.

Tanaka is neither an experienced monk nor a shōmyō expert, but he knows that the chanting of the Kannon Sutra is essential to his and the other monks’ identities as clergy at Sensō-ji. This is clear from the extent to which he was able to describe the musical and

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Furthermore, the matter of the bodhisattva’s gender is also a complicated one. Throughout Asia, Kannon is described and represented sometimes as male and sometimes as female. The Japanese language enables speakers to avoid gendered pronouns, and so I cannot rely on Tanaka’s interpretation of the bodhisattva’s gender since he never indicated it even in passing. Depictions in Asakusa tend to suggest more feminine traits, and so I will use feminine pronouns here, also altering quotations that use male pronouns for the sake of consistency.

6 An early line of the sutra reads: “Good man, suppose there are immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of living beings who are undergoing various trials and suffering. If they hear of this bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds and single-mindedly call [her] name, then at once [she] will perceive the sound of their voices and they will all gain deliverance from their trials” (Burton Watson, trans., The Lotus Sutra (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 298–9).
spiritual dimensions of shōmyō in general, and its practice at this temple in particular. Because the sound of chant is voiced as a spiritual exercise rather than a performance for entertainment, Tanaka was in fact hesitant to call shōmyō music. He explained that shōmyō is comprised of the vocalization of a sacred text and includes the playing of particular instruments. Some of these texts are chanted with a fushi (melody), which he described as having “atypical melodic contours” (fudan kikanai yō na ontei; see, for example, the melodic chant of “Sōrei Sanbō” [The Three Refuges] transcribed in Example 1, and heard at 4:22-4:39 in Video 3), and others are intoned without a fushi and with a constant rhythm. The accompanying instruments’ sounds, he explained, are mainly for notification—such as the kei that the chief priest strikes to mark changes between sections of the ceremony—with

![Example 1. The opening chant to the morning ritual at Sensō-ji as sung on July 6, 2012. The chief priest sang the melody slowly and without meter, inflecting it with scoops into and away from certain pitches. The fushi of this chant is built on neighboring tonal centers (kakuon) of F and G, with ritsu tetrachords formed between those pitches and a third lesser tonal center, C (Koizumi 1958, 1977, and 1977).](image)

7 Tanaka pointed out that the Japanese word for music, ongaku (音楽), literally means “enjoy sound,” and so he did not feel that it was a suitable label for shōmyō, which is not created to be enjoyed, but to show religious devotion and cultivate mindfulness. He did, however, describe the chants performed with a fushi as “intimately related to music” (ongaku to iu kankeisei wa misetsu) by virtue of their melodic contour.

8 The fushi of the “Sōrei Sanbō” chant at Sensō-ji is built on the ritsu scale as described by Koizumi Fumio. As Koizumi explains, the ritsu scale consists of two disjuncted ritsu tetrachords. A ritsu tetrachord is made up of two tonal centers positioned a fourth apart, and is defined by its intermediate tone positioned a major second over the lower tonal center. The ritsu is the scale most typically heard in the music of gagaku, and today it is mainly heard only in that repertoire, and in Buddhist shōmyō [Fumio Koizumi, Nihon No Oto: Sekai No Naka No Nihon Ongaku, (Tokyo: Seido-sha, 1977); Fumio Koizumi, Nihon Dento Ongaku No Kenkyū (Tokyo: Ongaku no tomo-sha, 1958); Fumio Koizumi, “Musical Scales in Japanese Music,” in Asian Musics in an Asian Perspective, ed. Fumio Koizumi et al. (Tokyo: Heibonsha Limited, 1977), 73–79]. The ritsu scale heard in Sensō-ji’s “Sōrei Sanbō” can be seen in the footnote on the following page.
no spiritual/religious meaning of which Tanaka was aware. 9

He did, however, emphasize that the distinctive sound of the Kannon Sutra chant is central, in his mind, to the identity of Asakusa. At Sensō-ji, the sutra is chanted in classical Chinese, delivered syllabically on a constant tone. While in the Japanese language, the

\[ \text{Kannon Kyō} \]

\textbf{The Kannon Sutra (opening)}

\begin{tabular}{l}
\textit{Solo} \quad \textbf{\( \frac{d}{9} = 60 \)} \\
\textit{Chorus} \quad \textbf{\( \frac{d}{50} \)}
\end{tabular}

\textit{Chū-daiko} \quad \textbf{\( \frac{d}{220} \)}

\begin{tabular}{l}
\textit{Solo} \quad \textit{accel.} \quad \textbf{\( \frac{d}{190} \)} \\
\textit{Chorus} \quad \textit{accel.} \quad \textbf{\( \frac{d}{220} \)}
\end{tabular}

\begin{tabular}{l}
\textit{Chū-daiko} \quad \textit{ff} \quad \textbf{\( \frac{d}{220} \)}
\end{tabular}

\begin{align*}
\text{mf} & \quad \text{myō hō renge kyō kan ze on bo satsu fu monbondai ni jū go} \\
\text{mf} & \quad \text{ni ji. mu jin ni bo sa. soku jū za ki. hen dan u ken. ga ssō kō butsu. ni sa ze gon.}
\end{align*}

Example 2. The opening of The Kannon Sutra as rendered at Sensō-ji. The chief priest chants the opening line syllabically on a single pitch, scooping upward on the last word in the line. He accelerates and slows again dramatically in this short phrase, demonstrating the treatment of tempo that will take place over a longer span in the main body of the sutra. The congregation then joins him (on approximately the same pitch) along with the \textit{chū-daiko}, beginning slowly and at a moderate dynamic, and speeding up and intensifying gradually to achieve a vigorous and booming effect.

The text of “Sōrei Sanbō” translates as “I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the Law (dharma), I take refuge in the Order (sangha), (Isshin keirei shihō seishō chū fū, Isshin keirei shihō seishō chiu hō, Isshin keirei shihō seishō chū sō).”

9 William P. Malm, in his pioneering monograph in Japanese music, describes the same morning ceremony at Sensō-ji (sixty-six years earlier!) in his chapter on religious music. In his text, Malm gives more attention to the instruments used in the service, and describes the sequence of the ceremony’s opening, rather than the Kannon Sutra that I emphasize here. He does note that the ceremony ends with a chant underpinned by the steady \textit{taiko} drumbeat (presumably the Kannon Sutra), leading to a recessional accompanied by the larger hidden drum [William P. Malm, \textit{Traditional Japanese Music and Musical Instruments}, Revised Edition (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 2000), 70-72].
differentiation between long and short vowels is usually essential, in the Chinese-language chanting of sutras, that distinction is obscured because each character of the text (rather than each syllable) is given the value of one beat. Classical Chinese is spoken and understood by only a tiny minority of people in Japan, and the particular syllabic articulation of the chant is unique to shōmyō. The linguistic and rhythmic features of this vocalization, therefore, make the chanting of the sutra sonically distinctive. In Asakusa, this uncommon sound is embodied in the monks as special spiritual knowledge, which they make physically manifest in their vocal articulation of the chant. At Sensō-ji, this chant is accompanied by the firm, regular beating of a chū-daiko drum, with one stroke on each beat of chanted text (see Example 3, and hear at 19:20-19:40 in Video 3). The beating of the drum along with chanted sutras is atypical in Tendai practice. The drumming, therefore, further heightens the sonic distinctiveness of the chant in Asakusa. Tanaka himself pointed this out, identifying the use of the drum in the chant at Sensō-ji as a particularly important sonic and spiritual feature of the neighborhood. By virtue of his particular perspective and objectives as an eager young monk, Tanaka considers the sound of the chanted sutra essential not only to the life of the temple but also to the sonic identity of Asakusa as a whole. By participating in the ritual’s soundscape—through responding to the chief priest’s instrumental signals and chanting the sutra and other Buddhist prayers—he actively engages with Asakusa’s trope of spirituality, perpetuating its presence in the neighborhood.

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10 The text in Example 3 is the first segment of the beginning lines of the Kannon Sutra: “At that time the bodhisattva Inexhaustible Intent immediately rose from his seat, bared his right shoulder, pressed his palms together and, facing the Buddha, spoke these words: World Honored One, this Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds—why is [she] called Perceiver of the World’s Sounds?” (Watson, The Lotus Sutra, 298.)

11 The beating of a drum, along with the chanted sutra, is common in the Nichiren Sect in particular, where an uchiwa-daiko (fan drum) is struck to accompany the shōmyō. The more common instrument for this purpose in the Tendai Sect is the mokugyo (Malm, Traditional Japanese Music and Musical Instruments, 72–3).
ii. Tanaka’s spiritual musikscape

Although it is central to his life as a Buddhist monk, shōmyō is only one of the many sounds that Tanaka encounters while at Sensō-ji. He is not isolated from the heterogeneous soundscape of the dense urban neighborhood that echoes around him. As a single human agent, he hears that diverse soundscape from his particular social perspective, delimited by his personal background and priorities. Moment by moment he constructs a fluctuating spiritual musikscape for himself that can change in breadth and depth depending on the time, his location, and his action. He encounters the physically real soundscape montage of Asakusa, but consciously experiences a personal musikscape that can expand or contract, transforming to differently inform his meaningful sense of place at different moments.

To analyze this process, let us consider first Tanaka’s experience of sonic emplacement within Sonic Scene 1 of his musikscape described above. In Sonic Scene 1, Tanaka participated in the morning ritual inside the sanctuary of Sensō-ji’s Main Hall. For Tanaka—and likely also for the vast majority of people who use the temple—the interior of the temple’s Main Hall is conceptually divided into multiple component places, of which the sanctuary is one. It is physically distinct from the outer nave, separated by a metal screen and distinguished by more formal and sacred décor, and Sensō-ji officials must approve visitors’ access. Although sounds can flow between the sanctuary and the nave, it is clear that the two areas are meant to be regarded as separate and different from one another. The sacred altar spaces are inside the sanctuary, and the ceremonial actions of the daily rituals take place exclusively within its walls. The nave, on the other hand, while still part of the religious building, is open to the public. Furthermore, the doors of the nave are kept
open during the daytime, and so it is not physically or sonically closed off from the public square outside.

Despite the lack of sonic barriers between the sanctuary and adjacent secular spaces, at the time of the morning rituals, the various activities of the neighborhood are barely underway. There are very few audible sounds being produced in the vicinity that might impede upon Tanaka’s focused conscious experience. He can easily hear the chief priest strike the kei to signal key moments in the ritual, and he is able to concentrate on the sounds of the chant, participating in the social meaning of the sanctuary without sonic distraction. He is able to limit his musikscape to the sacred sounds of the shōmyō, and the spiritual meanings they have for him, with relative ease.

In Sonic Scene 2, however, Tanaka’s sonic awareness necessarily becomes wider. Although he still is physically situated inside the sanctuary during afternoon rituals, his musikscape expands to include many of the sounds being created throughout the temple’s Main Hall. In the bustling afternoon hours, more tourists and visitors inevitably create sounds that are external to the rituals inside the sanctuary, and can reach an immense cacophony on particularly active days. Nevertheless, the separation between the sanctuary and the nave remains important. Temple officials still regulate who may enter the sanctuary (generally only members of Sensō-ji’s clergy and congregation), and the metal screen acts as a physical—though sonically permeable—barrier between the two spaces.

Tanaka noted that there are different conventions of behavior for the casual visitors and tourists who freely enter the outer nave, and the people who are given access to the inner sanctuary. While those in the nave often talk at full volume, even raising their voices to be heard over the din, the people who enter the sanctuary should only speak in order to
participate in the chanting of the sacred texts. Tanaka assumed that those who choose to come into the sanctuary do so to pray, and that their behavior reflects an attitude of contemplation and piety. He explained that because they are there to pay devotion to Kannon, each person may do so a bit differently, but they tend to fold their hands and make their own prayer in their minds/hearts (kokoro). Since Kannon of Sensō-ji is so well known, Tanaka pointed out, many people come to such services specifically to pray to her, and many chant the Kannon Sutra along with the monks, reading from their own printed copies of the text. He noted that these laypeople participating in the ritual avoid making disruptive sounds, and should, for example, silence their cellular phones to avoid unwelcome ringtones. Only feet away in the nave, however, phones regularly ring; people use them to take pictures and even have conversations without being reprimanded. Tanaka explained that during services, he is aware of the many people on the other side of the dividing screen raucously making sounds very nearby as they laugh and talk to one another, throw coins into collection boxes, and noisily shake metal omikuji cans. Yet, he does not consider them to be a distraction, nor do they take away from his ability to participate in the service and perform his duties. He hears their sounds, but does not heed them; they are fringe sounds in his auditory field. He instead gives his attention to the prayers being

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12 The clergy chant other sutras during the ceremonies, some of which are more difficult and are not so commonly known, and the laypeople seem to listen quietly during them, but the Kannon Sutra is fairly well known among the general population in Japan, and Tanaka speculated that the more devout members of the congregation likely also chant that sutra in their own homes at their home altars (butsudan). According to accomplished shōmyō vocalist Sakurai Makiko, the comparatively simple syllabic and rhythmically regular chant of the Kannon Sutra as it is performed at Sensō-ji is a style that was developed to allow non-expert congregation members to easily learn and pray using the sutra, at the temple along with the clergy, or in their own homes (personal interview, 2014). In this way, Sensō-ji — where the more nuanced and melismatic shōmyō are also chanted by monks in various ritual services — can also be seen as the site of overlap of two contrasting Buddhist soundscapes: the subtle and sophisticated sounds of the esoteric shōmyō mostly sung in private rituals, and the pulsing heavier sounds of the Everyman’s shōmyō sung in the Main Hall.
offered, the instrumental signals, the pulse of the drum, and the words of the hymns and sutras.

Considering Tanaka’s statements, as well as my own routine observations in the temple, I infer that Tanaka considers the sounds made as part of daily Buddhist services inside the inner sanctuary of Sensō-ji’s Main Hall to constitute a soundscape. The sounds of the ritual contribute to—and spring from—the spiritual significance of the sanctuary as a special, consecrated area within the Main Hall, while certain other sounds are discouraged there in order to maintain its sanctity. The clamor of visitors who freely mill about in the nave do not contribute to the meditative spiritual tone being fostered by the service in the sanctuary, and might be regarded as constituting a separate soundscape at the temple—for instance, one of boisterous tourism. Tanaka’s comments indicate that he considers the sounds from the people in the nave to be part of a larger soundscape, that of the Main Hall, which includes both the sounds created by the visitors in the nave and those created by the worshippers in the sanctuary.

When he is in the sanctuary to participate in the afternoon ritual, Tanaka’s musikscape includes many of the various sounds being made inside the Main Hall, but sounds of the service are fundamental. The tourism soundscape generated in the nave overlaps with the clergy’s spiritual one inside the sanctuary. Though he can hear it, he attests that the din of the visitors in the nave does not disturb him. It is likely that the visitors’ noise functions in the way that background music functions for many of us who use spaces with constructed sonic design.13 We may not, for instance, always notice the

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13 See, for example, Jonathan Sterne, “Sounds Like the Mall of America,” *Ethnomusicology* 41 (1997): 22–50. Sterne notes that Americans (and I would add, citizens of most other post-industrialist capitalist societies) today “take for granted that almost every commercial establishment they enter will offer them an endless
music playing on our grocery store’s sound system—it does not *usually* compel us to dance or even consciously change how we shop. But if it were absent, the space would lack something. For Tanaka, though he focuses on the sounds and activities of the ceremony, he is unable to completely exclude the sounds of the noisy visitors from his consciousness, and they continue to inform his sense of emplacement in this lively, popular, urban temple.

In enacting these rituals, Tanaka and the other monks sonically assert their spirituality inside the Main Hall. In the early morning service this is less strenuous, with far fewer visitors creating sounds in and around the nave and with the daily commotion of the neighborhood only barely commenced. The monks’ deep voices and the metallic ring of the small gong fill the space of the sanctuary and flow through the nave with ease. The few

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14 Tia DeNora, however, has documented the ways in which retailers employ music as a resource for “heightening scene specificity,” to create a sense of occasion for their customers, and to offer them particular “modes of agency.” She nonetheless makes clear that customers may interact with, and react, to music in retail settings “mostly without conscious awareness” [Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 138, 142].

15 According to accomplished *shōmyō* vocalist, Sakurai Makiko, *shōmyō* are chanted with the explicit intent of purifying the ritual environment with sound, in addition to communicating with any deities that may be relevant to the specific texts or prayers being chanted (personal interview, 2014).
morning temple visitors are there with a more earnest agenda than the throngs of tourists who come later. They are mostly more subdued, and the monks’ prayers reach their ears easily in the relative quiet of the hall. In the afternoons, however, the interior of the building is a resonant cacophony. Tanaka and the other monks must work harder to claim the sacred space of the sanctuary. It is impossible for their voices to drown out the noisy visitors completely, but they succeed in sonically establishing the sanctuary for themselves and for the purposes of their ritual, rendering other noises that drift through the metal screen irrelevant. Visitors only feet away in the echoing nave mostly do not seem to be affected by the monks’ chant—faintly audible to them over the din—and blithely carry on.

When the booming drumbeat of the chū-daiko begins to punctuate each pulse in the chant of the sutra, the soundscape of the ritual swells powerfully beyond the sanctuary, echoes through the nave, emanates out the great open doors and into the temple grounds, overlapping with an otherwise public and secular soundscape. This is the sutra of Kannon, the “Perceiver of the Sounds of the World.” The drumbeat calls out and gives praise to her, accompanying the chanted words of scripture that describe her theological significance. The rumbling drumbeat becomes part of the musikscape of everyone in the vicinity; even tourists and local pedestrians casually walking in the precincts dozens of feet away from the Main Hall suddenly become aware that a service is taking place there. Most of all, the drumbeat is a part of the musikscape of Tanaka and the other people inside the now reverberating inner sanctuary. The sonorous pulse works not only to call on Kannon to hear the prayer, but also to strongly unify the people’s chant in sound and pious intent. Engulfed in the pulse of the drum, Tanaka seeks to succumb to its immense volume and rhythmic regularity, to coordinate their chant with its beat, and to internalize the meaning
of the sutra in that state of mindfulness. At other temples in the Tendai Sect, this kind of unification is achieved in a considerably less thunderous way by beating a pulse on a wooden temple block (mokugyo). The drum and chant at Sensō-ji is one prominent, diurnal sound that is unique to Asakusa, and one that is central to Tanaka’s experience of the neighborhood. By performing it in the open public Main Hall, the monks not only create a sonic sense of place for themselves inside the sanctuary, but they also know that their booming spiritual sounds will erupt out of that space to be heard by people throughout the building and beyond.

In considering Tanaka’s larger musikscape in Asakusa, as described in Sonic Scene 3 above, it is important to note that, just as his musikscape during rituals is grounded in the physical layout of the building, his sonic emplacement on a larger scale at the temple is also shaped by physical and conceptual attributes. Sensō-ji’s precinct is a place with consistently defined social meaning. Though lacking a walled border, it is materially delineated by its open plazas and its prominent buildings with brightly colored Buddhist architecture. These features contrast the narrow alleyways and diverse secular urban design that surround the temple. For Tanaka—and likely for the vast majority of people who encounter the temple—Sensō-ji’s precinct is a conceptually distinct place from the rest of the neighborhood, defined by its physical features and its spiritual significance.

Certainly this distinctly spiritual sense of place cultivated at the temple engenders particular conventions of behavior. Many of the temple’s spiritual elements (such as its festivals and architecture) are also attractive to non-religious sightseers, and a great number of people come to Asakusa specifically to visit this famous site. And although it has a remarkably open and unrestricted relationship with various secular aspects of Asakusa,
certain behaviors are avoided or discouraged on its premises. For instance, the goings-on of the sex industry at Yoshiwara are a safe distance away from the temple, as are the “base” spectacles of Rokku’s adult films and strip clubs. Although homeless people are often plentiful in other parts of the neighborhood, they typically do not set up camp on Sensō-ji’s land. There are no pubs that directly open onto the precincts, and overtly drunken behavior is not tolerated.\footnote{I witnessed the enforcement of this final unwritten rule on a summer day in 2012. A middle-aged man was behaving drunkenly, disturbing the crowd of sightseeing families and schoolchildren gathered in Sensō-ji’s outdoor plaza. Police officers from the nearby police box approached him, and when he did not voluntarily withdraw from the scene, they physically restrained him and escorted him away.} Naturally, the different conventions of behavior for inside and outside of the temple’s territory generate contrasting soundscapes in those locations. These distinct places are, however, materially and conceptually linked within the larger place of Asakusa, and the physical openness of Sensō-ji allow for fluid movement and flow of sound between them.

As I have demonstrated with the sound maps of the neighborhood in Chapter 4, in addition to its own inherent spiritual sounds and meanings, the sounds of all six of Asakusa’s tropes overlap the territory of Sensō-ji’s precinct. The entertainment sounds of Hanayashiki’s revelers, for instance, can be heard at the doors of the Main Hall. The Asakusa geisha—who are nonreligious entertainers—provide instrumental accompaniment at a number of the temple’s events and perform their secular dances at the annual Sanja Matsuri. Children perform at an annual kabuki festival held directly beside the temple’s Main Hall, and in May 2012, a family of professional kabuki actors even visited Sensō-ji to pray for success as they assumed new stage names.\footnote{On May 12, 2012, “actor Kagawa Teruyuki visited Sensō-ji to pray for success with his upcoming succession to the kabuki stage name Ichikawa Chūsha IX. Along with his son and several other members of his family he will take on the new stage name at the June Grand Kabuki at the Shimbashi Enbujō theater. He was joined... by his son (8), who will make his kabuki debut as Ichikawa Danko, his brother Ichikawa Kamejirō (36) who...} Amateur musicians and
actors perform traditional and folk music and dramatic skits on the stage at the yearly Okuyama Fûkei event held on the temple land west of the Main Hall. Tourism sounds also fill the precincts on an almost constant basis during daylight hours as sightseers from all over Japan and around the world snap pictures, buy souvenirs, and speak to one another in the dialects and languages of their homelands. Rickshaw runners’ tour routes skirt the edges of the temple’s land, inflecting it with a sense of the traditional or late-modern roman. Everyday Shitamachi sounds are also a permeating presence at Sensō-ji since the daily activities of local residents are able to significantly overlap with the space of the temple. As Tanaka observed,

People are able to pass through the precincts on their way to school or work in ways that are not possible at other temples. People are able to walk through here after going to the grocery store, and we see them with their shopping bags full of broccoli, lettuce, and meat. In that way, the temple has a very close tie to the locals... It’s wide open and accessible, anybody and everybody does come by the temple precincts, and many who pass by do so as just part of their daily life, like walking their dogs. So rather than a temple precinct, [I think people consider it to be] more like a familiar path. The distance between regular people and the temple is quite minimal. I think that is an important characteristic [of Sensō-ji/Asakusa].

Tanaka, therefore, has immediate access to the soundscapes of all of Asakusa’s tropes even without leaving the temple’s land. Even so, when asked about whether outside, non-spiritual sounds are disrupting to temple activities, he replied that they normally are not, speculating that perhaps the trees growing about the precinct absorb the city noise.

From his comments, however, we know that he does consciously hear the diversity of Asakusa’s soundscape from within the temple precinct. Considering those comments, I conclude that Tanaka considers the sounds created by Sensō-ji’s administration and clergy as part of the Buddhist rituals and festivals in the temple precinct to constitute a

will succeed to the name Ichikawa Sarunosuke IV, and his father (72) now using that name, who will become Ichikawa En-ô II” (Japan Zone Entertainment News, “Family Tradition Alive in Asakusa,” http://www.japan-zone.com/news/2012/05/12/family_tradition_alive_in_asakusa.shtml, accessed 23 September 2014).
soundscape. That is, those sounds (chanted prayers, festival music, chanted shouts [kakegoe] of festival participants, etc.) contribute to—and spring from—the spiritual significance of the precinct as a distinct area within Asakusa, and the activities conducted there. At the same time, other sounds are discouraged there in order to maintain an appropriate level of sanctity. The spirited sounds of Hanayashiki’s merry-makers, and even those of tourists and local passersby, are not part of the spiritual purposes of the temple, and might be regarded as constituting separate soundscapes in the neighborhood. Tanaka’s statements indicate that, to a certain extent, he considers the diverse audible sounds that flow through the precinct as distinct from the temple’s spiritual aims but essential to the urban character of the temple. He is aware of them, although he sometimes has to quiet them from his immediate consciousness to fulfill certain spiritual duties at Sensō-ji, such as taking photographs at Kinryū no Mai.

At other times, Tanaka’s musikscape can expand still further, beyond the bounds of Sensō-ji. Even so, when considering the neighborhood as a whole, Tanaka explained:

“Asakusa is a neighborhood (machī) spreading out from the core (chūshin) of Sensō-ji... If someone says that they came to Asakusa to worship/pray (o-mairi), of course they mean Sensō-ji.” Since he is primarily involved in the spiritual lifestyle of a Buddhist monk, it is unsurprising that he sees Sensō-ji as the central and defining feature of the neighborhood. Of course he also understands that there is more to Asakusa than the temple and the activities that he can directly see and hear there. Other than its spiritual elements, he described the neighborhood primarily as a tourist destination and the home of particular entertainment venues, naming such select features as the soaplands of Yoshiwara, the cinemas of Rokku, the many drinking taverns, the teahouses, and the amusement park. He
even went so far as to correlate the existence of Asakusa’s entertainment venues to the positioning of the temple in the neighborhood, explaining that the confluence of all these activities and places, including Sensō-ji, are a part of the tourism industry.

While he expressed appreciation for Asakusa’s diversity in general, he seemed to pass negative judgment on Yoshiwara in particular, which he repeatedly described as “unpleasant/indecent/dirty” (yarashii), implicitly referencing the sex trade activities for which that area is best known. Perhaps this emphasis is evidence of concern on the part of Sensō-ji’s larger community of clergy about those operations’ proximity to the disciplined way of life pursued and encouraged at the temple. Perhaps the young monk was striving to underscore the proper Buddhist perspective on such activities, or revealing a personal struggle to maintain that discipline within himself in the face of such proximity. Whatever the reason, Tanaka perceives Asakusa as having contrasting sacred and profane sides that exist in something of a symbiotic relationship.

Strikingly, in his discussion of Asakusa’s larger cultural identity, Tanaka did not mention any of the performance traditions that take place in the neighborhood. This is very likely due to the scope of his own personal interests. As a seemingly typical young man, he would rather listen to his favorite popular music than attend Asakusa’s kabuki and rakugo performances. Tanaka’s musikscape in the wider world of contemporary Japan is more tuned to the popular culture of his generation than such older cultural practices. Although he lives, studies, and prays in close proximity to performance traditions with a long and venerable history, his general lack of interest in those more time-honored art forms has kept their soundscapes in the distant fringe of his consciousness, even though they
sometimes actually overlap with the physical space of the precincts and the spiritual life of the temple.

Despite this awareness of the sonic variety of the neighborhood, it is not all-inclusive. Tanaka navigates Asakusa’s dense and diversely meaningful sounds to fashion a personal musikscape that has significance for him. It is focused on the trope of spirituality, but it is also importantly characterized by tourism and certain kinds of entertainment, which he views as connected to the presence of the temple. Within this moderately diverse Asakusa musikscape, Tanaka unambiguously considers one sound to be the most representative and important quality in defining the neighborhood’s distinctive sense of place:

“[I think] the Kannon Sutra is the prototypical sound of Asakusa (ichiban Asakusa-rashii oto)... Particularly when the Kannon Sutra and the taiko are happening together, it is an exceptionally ‘Asakusa sound’ (sugoku Asakusa-rashii oto), [because that combination does not happen at other Tendai temples].”

Even so, he recognizes that it is not simply the sound of the shōmyō resonating through the neighborhood that makes Asakusa the kind of place it is:

...I imagine that most people do not have the opportunity to hear sutras every day. There are people who have their own home altars (butsudan) and request home services, and they might hear them. But what we do in the Main Hall—we read the sutra with the taiko and the mokugyo—I think has a different sound and atmosphere... So Asakusa is a neighborhood where you can have a direct spiritual experience that you cannot have every day.

The unconventional openness of Sensō-ji’s precinct, which Tanaka also described as lending the neighborhood a uniquely casual-spiritual atmosphere, also enables the distinctive spiritual sounds of the temple to have an impact on a greater number of people than would otherwise be possible. Just as the contact and overlap of spiritual and secular soundscapes inside the temple's Main Hall are essential to the building’s character for
Tanaka, his Asakusa musikscape affords him a similar sense of place on a larger scale, in which the contact and overlap of Sensō-ji’s spiritual soundscape with that of the secular life of the neighborhood is fundamental.

**Interlude**

*Rap, rap, rap. Rap, rap, rap. Rap, rap, rap.* A sharp staccato drumbeat drifts through Sensō-ji’s precinct and the grounds of Asakusa Shrine. A monkey trainer beats a small festival *taiko* as a small Japanese macaque marches back and forth in the shrine yard, balancing on stilts four feet off the ground. The striking sound cuts through the din of the active square. It is a regular, commonplace clatter for Tanaka, and he casually ignores it as he passes by the shrine on the way to his office job. It is an unexpected noise for the group of high school students visiting Asakusa from rural northern Japan—they descend Sensō-
ji’s eastern staircase and curiously investigate the rapping sound as it filters through the nearby trees. It excites the small child watching the monkey’s show, and she squeals in delight. Asakusa Seiko, a local geisha, does not notice the sound at all as she walks through the precincts on her way home from the nearby *shamisen* shop. The drumbeats do not intrude on her studied concentration as she recollects the melody and dance sequence she practiced this morning in her lessons.

**II. Entertainment Musiking in Asakusa**

Each person constructs and interprets Asakusa’s soundscape in their own way due to their unique social positioning and priorities. For Asakusa Seiko, this means carving out a musikscape that is anchored by the trope of entertainment, defined by her dedication to Japanese performing arts.\(^{18}\) She and Asakusa’s other forty or so geisha are officially registered at a central *kumiai* (union) office affiliated with Asakusa’s *hanamachi* (geisha district). Their social role as geisha is defined by the *kumiai*, through which they are institutionally designated as professional performing artists who actively study music and dance within the *hanamachi*’s community of teachers, and who regularly perform inside that geisha district.\(^ {19}\)

Seiko came to Tokyo to join the Asakusa *hanamachi* from her hometown in Niigata Prefecture. She was interested in traditional Japanese dance from a very early age; her mother studied *nihon buyō* (Japanese classical dance), and Seiko remembers copying her footwork when she was as young as three years old. She also began practicing formally and

\(^{18}\) Asakusa Seiko is this woman’s geisha stage name, which she acquired upon entering the Asakusa *kumiai*. For clarity’s sake I will refer to her using the given name, Seiko, rather than the surname, Asakusa, to avoid conflating her with the neighborhood as a whole.

eventually decided to pursue a career in which she could continue studying and performing the dance that she loved.\textsuperscript{20} As of 2012, Seiko had lived and worked as a geisha in Asakusa for fourteen years, where she now specializes in dance. Her typical daily activities involve multiple music and dance keiko (practices) earlier in the day, and entertaining and performing for customers at formal, traditional Japanese-style banquets called ozashiki in local ochaya (teahouses) or ryōtei (exclusive traditional Japanese restaurants) in the afternoon and evenings. She sees herself as a professional musician and dancer, and she is particularly admired for her nihon buyō skills. She actively participates in the musical world of the Asakusa geisha community, and the performance traditions that they maintain are central to her entertainment practice in the neighborhood.

The Asakusa hanamachi is located in the few blocks north of the Kototoi Street thoroughfare, a heavily trafficked, four-lane boulevard that separates the area from Sensō-ji and the major tourist sites of the neighborhood. This area and its people are called the Asakusa karyūkai (a term which translates literally as “the flower and willow world” and refers to a community of geisha and the venues where they regularly perform), and it is physically and socially centered around the geisha union’s kenban (union office) in an otherwise quiet and ordinary residential area (indicated by the red star on Map 6 below). There are a number of ochaya and ryōtei in the blocks surrounding the kenban to which

\textsuperscript{20} Careers for females in classical Japanese performing arts are considerably limited. Women were banned from performing on all public stages in Japan in 1629 through a government decree that aimed to calm the chaos (brawls, vandalism, etc.) that developed around the then female-dominated kabuki scene, a law that remained in place until 1872. The role of female performers outside of theaters—who include the people today referred to as geisha—developed as the result of this ban, and while it is technically legal for women to perform onstage today (and they do so in many contexts), the custom of excluding them from professional kabuki (as well as nō and bunraku to a less formalized extent) remains an entrenched tradition. Still today, the only option for women like Seiko, who are interested in performance careers involving the music and dance of kabuki, is to become a geisha (for a more extensive history of Japanese female performers and their relationship to the theater, see Kelly Foreman’s \textit{The Gei of Geisha}, 42-51).
Seiko and her fellow geisha are hired to perform at private ozashiki parties. Seiko and most—if not all—of Asakusa’s geisha live in this area as well.

Seiko’s everyday activities take place in a rather segregated entertainment sphere. The kenban contains an office where employees manage the union, keep track of performance requests from ochaya and ryōtei, organize the geisha’s schedules, and communicate with them about logistics and other ozashiki details. There are also rooms in the kenban that are used for keiko with music and dance teachers, as well as a modestly
sized performance hall that is used for some occasional larger-scale performances. Outside of those performances, the kenban is not open to the public, and non-members of the arts community are typically precluded from entering the building to hear music and dance lessons. The majority of the geisha’s performances are staged at the nearby exclusive restaurants where only the few paying customers have access to hear and see them. Due to these physical and social realities and their sonic repercussions, Seiko understands the Asakusa hanamachi as a mostly insular world—significantly detached both physically and socially from other parts of the neighborhood.

Despite this relative isolation, however, the diverse life of urban Asakusa is very nearby and accessible when she needs to do errands in town or participate in civic activities. Seiko visits the temple’s active precinct and nearby shopping streets on otherwise ordinary days to relax and enjoy a little free time. She must pass through some of the most active areas of Asakusa when picking up new shamisen strings or other
accessories at the local music shop. Once a year, she joins the crowds of people who visit Sensō-ji at midnight to usher in the New Year. In the spirit of local community and casual devotion, the Asakusa geisha also participate in some of the neighborhood’s more prominent spiritual festivals. For instance, a group of them put on a dance performance on the stage of the Asakusa Shrine’s Kagura Hall as part of the yearly Sanja Matsuri celebration, and they form an ensemble to perform the hayashi music that accompanies Sensō-ji’s bi-annual Kinryū no Mai. The Asakusa geisha also make an appearance at the Tokyo Marathon, beating taiko in encouragement as the thousands of runners pass by Kaminarimon each February. Seiko does not participate in each of these events every year, but in her fourteen years as a member of the Asakusa karyūkai, she has been involved in many of them a number of times.

Seiko’s musikscape is not static. It exists in her mind as a cognitive construction, changing with time, her activities, and range of attention. At certain times, for instance, it might be very focused, incorporating exclusively the sounds of a single small-scale performance, providing her a sense of place within the narrow confines of an ozashiki room at an ochaya. At other times it expands, allowing her to feel more broadly emplaced in the wider district. Nevertheless, Seiko’s experience of sound in the neighborhood revolves around the geisha’s music and dance to which she has committed her life, and which define her as a professional performing artist.

Below I describe a series of scenes from Seiko’s entertainment musikscape, which I label Sonic Scenes 1 and 2. Sonic Scene 1 is the broader of the two, and it incorporates her experience while performing at Kinryū no Mai. Sonic Scene 2 is quite narrow, taking into account only her experience of sound and place while dancing at a small ozashiki gathering.
After presenting these two Sonic Scenes of Seiko’s entertainment musikscape in the neighborhood, I will go on to analyze them with reference to her musiking practice, the nature of her agency, her relationships to Asakusa’s cultural tropes, the diverse range of sounds she encounters there, and finally her changeable sense of place that arises from these factors.

**Sonic Scene 1: Seiko’s Entertainment Musikscape at Kinryū no Mai**

Seiko’s broader Asakusa musikscape is most observable in moments when she participates in neighborhood events such as Kinryū no Mai. Kinryū no Mai is a special dance that has been held each year at Sensō-ji since 1958, when it was begun to celebrate the reconstruction of the temple’s Main Hall following its destruction during WWII. It is performed in the temple precinct by an impressive, 18-meter long golden dragon figure. The event was designed in commemoration of the legend that states that long ago, a grove of 1,000 pine trees (a symbol of a good harvest) suddenly appeared overnight near the temple. A great golden dragon—a manifestation of the Bodhisattva Kannon—descended into the trees from the heavens and was never seen again.21 The geisha of the Asakusa *karyūkai* provide the special processional *hayashi* music written for the event.22 They play *shamisen* and *takebue* (transverse bamboo flutes), producing a slow pentatonic melody that is played heterophonically and with very little ornamentation. They are accompanied by local amateur volunteers (all male), who punctuate the geisha’s melody with emphatic strikes on an ō-*daiko* (large drum), *shō* (hanging basin-shaped gong), and *myōhachi* (large...
cymbals), creating a heavy, march-like effect (see, for example, 0:00-1:20 in Video 4). Eight more local volunteers also puppeteer the dragon, steering it in its dramatic dance.

Seiko has been a hayashi musician for this vibrant festival on several occasions. On one such day, she sits in the wooden yatai (cart) among six of her fellow geisha amid the steady clatter of chappa (small cymbals), her small takebue resting in her lap waiting to be played again. The sunlight sparkles off of the gold serpent tail that the dancers are bobbing about the square in front of Sensō-ji’s pagoda (see Video 5, and Image 90 on page 165). The magnificent golden dragon, suspended on eight poles guided by eight men, has paraded down Nakamise Street and is now giving its votive dance in the heart of the precinct. Surrounded by a great crowd of tourists and locals gathered to witness this rare spectacle, the creature writhes and quivers, pursuing and protecting the large lotus blossom orb—also bobbed about on a pole—that symbolizes the Bodhisattva Kannon.23 In the square,

tourists snap photographs, standing on tiptoes to get a better view over the throng. The
chappa clatter on, their texture punctuated by a strident beat on the ō-daiko, shō, and
myōhachi whenever the dragon makes a sudden darting gesture. Seiko reflects to herself, in
her moment of rest, that she is glad to live in such an urban geisha community where her
day-to-day schedule of practice and ozashiki can be occasionally peppered with events such
as Kinryū no Mai. Asakusa has a certain vitality, and it is a joy to her to participate in such
festivals and feel the energy of the town.

The percussion instruments clatter together in a final roll as the dragon’s dance
comes to an end. The crowd claps and cheers in enthusiasm, and begins to flock into the
square to get a closer look at the now-still dragon. Amid the throng, Seiko and the other
women nod to one another in agreement. She raises her flute to her lips again and watches
the most senior geisha for the signal that they are to begin. The leader raises her shamisen
plectrum with a prompting gesture and the women together begin their stately melody,
accompanied with steady beats on the taiko, shō, and myōhachi, as their yatai is wheeled
through the crowd behind the recessing dragon.

Sonic Scene 2:
Seiko’s Entertainment Musikscape in an Ozashiki

To consider Seiko’s Asakusa musikscape in one of its most focused moments, I am
presenting her experience of sound and place in a small ozashiki gathering. Ozashiki are
formal, traditional Japanese-style banquets to which geisha may be hired to attend and/or
perform. An ozashiki setting is usually physically defined by a private banquet room inside
a ryōtei or ochaya. There are tables for customers to sit to eat and drink, and often a
performance space where geisha, and sometimes some musician customers, will perform.\textsuperscript{24} An important social aspect of this setting is its exclusivity, as ozashiki are quite expensive and are traditionally only made available to people who have been formally introduced by an established patron. Due to this expense and exclusivity, I did not have direct access to attend any such private formal events. For this reason, the scene I describe here has been constructed after analyzing several videos of Seiko and other Asakusa geisha performing at ozashiki, and from Seiko’s comments to me in our conversation together.\textsuperscript{25} In this

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24 & Typical ozashiki take place in ochaya in a small tatami room. In those venues, geisha perform in the same area where the guests are seated, usually in a designated section of the tatami room. Larger ozashiki gatherings are held in ryōtei, where there is always at least one large room containing a raised platform stage for larger-scale performances, and a number of small rooms for post-performance parties (Foreman, The Gei of Geisha: Music, Identity and Meaning, 63).
25 & See the following links for the videos that contributed most significantly to constructing this ethnographic scene:\\
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constructed ozashiki, Seiko and one other geisha are performing a short set of music and
dance for customers inside a small private dining room in a local Asakusa ochaya.

*         *

The thin applause of the small crowd fades and Seiko raises her head from her bow. She picks up her folded sensu (paper fan) and rises elegantly to her feet feeling satisfied with her performance. She has just finished the dance of an excerpt from the age-old nagauta (a type of song from kabuki, accompanied by shamisen) "Yoshiwara Suzume" ("Yoshiwara Sparrows"), and she and her accompanying jikata (musician, i.e. singer and/or instrumentalist) are about to perform their final number. She shuffles her tabi socks smoothly across the tatami floor to the last dance’s starting position, the long skirt of her susohiki dancer's kimono trailing behind her. The other geisha plucks the strings on her shamisen lightly and adjusts its tuning. The ozashiki clients twitter softly in admiration of the women's performance and anticipation of the last song and dance yet to come. Seiko waits, quiet and motionless.

After a short moment of silence, the jikata begins the lilting melody of “Asakusa Meibutsu” (“Famous Things of Asakusa”), the Asakusa karyūkai's customary closing tune at ozashiki recitals. Seiko has performed this dance so many times that the movements are second nature to her, and she responds intuitively to the sound. At the key moment, a few

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26 The Asakusa geisha’s most customary ozashiki closing involves performing “Asakusa Meibutsu” and another tune, “Sawagi,” consecutively. According to Uzawa Yoshiko, the Asakusa karyūkai were given permission to perform “Sawagi” from the Yoshiwara karyūkai, who had been performing the song as their ozashiki closer, shortly after WWII. The lyrics of both “Sawagi” and “Asakusa Meibutsu” are evocative of the locality of the Asakusa-Yoshiwara area. Yoshiko Uzawa, “Shokugyō Hito-Toshite No Geisha-Tachi - Senzen • Sengo No Nihon Wo Sasaeta Karyūkai No Bunka - 2 (Geisha as Professionals: The Culture of the Karyūkai That Sustained Pre- and Post-War Japan - 2),” Mitsubishi Zaidan Kenkyūjo Seika Hōkokusho, 2011, 5–6. According to Kelly M. Foreman, “Sawagi” is quintessentially associated with Tokyo geisha, and different Tokyo hanamachi perform the song their own idiosyncratic ways to this day.
seconds into the shamisen's melody, she comes alive with the music. She turns toward the audience and takes center stage, her chic white and red fan fluttering gracefully. With the first words of the song from the jikata, Seiko fluidly and precisely executes the choreography of the dance, expressing the meaning of the lyrics through her motions. Amid her focus, she becomes aware of one ozashiki client, who had perhaps had a bit too much sake (rice wine) to drink, conversing loudly with his neighbor. She sighs to herself internally. With all the work that the geisha put in to perfect their arts, it would be nice, she reflects, if the people in the audience would demonstrate minimal etiquette and pay attention. But he is a paying customer, and so the performers cannot make such demands. Besides, there are several other customers here who deserve her best effort. With this in mind, and without missing a single gesture, Seiko promptly readjusts her focus on the

music and dance. As the shamisen slows to the song’s final cadence, she draws the head of her sensu toward her chest, tilting her shoulder coyly toward the audience, who all—even the disruptive *ojisan* (middle-aged man)—break out in appreciative applause.

**Analysis**

Seiko has certain personal priorities and past experiences that structure her behaviors and perceptions as a human agent. In this regard, she has consciously chosen to be in Asakusa for the purpose of studying and working as a geisha within the neighborhood’s *karyūkai*. Her comments indicate that she mainly views the neighborhood as the larger context of her *hanamachi*—as the geisha district’s backyard—and her sonic experiences in Asakusa are in many ways grounded in the trope of entertainment. She interacts with and experiences the *hanamachi* and the rest of the neighborhood from her perspective as a seasoned geisha. She sees her role there to be practicing her community’s music and dance repertoire at the highest skill level possible, performing it wholeheartedly for her audiences, and carrying on the spirit and aesthetics of those traditional entertainment arts. She understands the Asakusa *karyūkai* as an institution with local roots that reach back to the Edo period, and its arts as a continuation of centuries-old performance traditions. Seiko and the rest of the members of the Asakusa *karyūkai* create particular entertainment sounds in their work and dedicated and industrious lifestyle as geisha.

i. **The sound of *ozashiki* music**

The sounds of traditional Japanese music constitute an essential component of Seiko’s identity as a geisha, and they anchor her entertainment musikscape in Asakusa. To understand this well, it is useful to consider the literal definition of the word geisha in
Japanese, the context of those women’s work and performance, and the particular musics that define their social role. The meaning of the word geisha is in fact inextricably linked to the traditional Japanese arts, including music and dance. It is written with two Chinese characters that literally mean “art” (芸, gei) and “person” (者, sha). Use of the Japanese word gei is applied in a narrower sense than the word “art” in English, limited to the fine and performing arts. Contemporary geisha, therefore, are multi-disciplinary professional artists who are defined in particular by their study and performance of several genres of traditional Japanese music and dance. Their repertoire is diverse, but it centers on styles that feature the shamisen, including genres from the classical Japanese theater (butai gei, including genres such as nagauta, tokiwazu, kiyomoto, jiuta), and others that are shorter and simpler and therefore considered better suited for the smaller, more intimate ozashiki settings (ozashiki gei, including genres such as hauta, kouta, and zokkyoku). The classical theater genres may also be adapted for performance in ozashiki, but only by staging short key sections of longer songs.  

Geisha today perform their music and dance in a variety of contexts, large and small, but Seiko described her day-to-day agenda as dominated by appearances and performances at ozashiki. Ozashiki are the primary source of income for most geisha, and it is in these performances that they have the opportunity to present material from their ongoing training on a daily (or nightly) basis. Such performances are given for customers who call the kenban to request a geisha or group of geisha to attend their banquet. Since

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28 Kelly Foreman describes ozashiki as geisha’s “day job,” from which they are able to accumulate the money to fund the larger public stage performances that hanamachi regularly put on. At these larger public performances, geisha showcase some of the more serious arts that they study, which are often too long or require too much space to perform at ozashiki. These productions are perhaps the most essential for the majority of geisha, Foreman explains, because they “function as a public statement of geisha identity to both the traditional arts community and the public at large” (Foreman, *The Gei of Geisha*, 52).
*ozashiki* banquets are quite expensive, and are, by nature, entertaining but formal affairs, they are frequented only by clients who are affluent enough to pay, and normally for only certain special occasions such as important business dinners. Customers need not have special knowledge of the geisha’s performing arts, although many who seek out such performances do.\(^{29}\) Despite the rules of etiquette expected in these settings, play and whimsy are also a part of *ozashiki* events, and part of the geisha’s task is to help clients have an entertaining and stress-free experience there. Kelly Foreman (2008) explains that a key element of this fun and merrymaking at *ozashiki* is a sense of “time travel play” afforded by the Edo- and Meiji-period repertoire performed by geisha, which is embraced as authentic due to the performers’ recognized artistic achievements. The sound of geisha’s music and its accompanying dance, therefore, play an important role in fostering the special, entertaining, traditional-Japanese-arts experience sought out in *ozashiki*.

Likewise, Seiko considers the music and dance of *ozashiki* to be essential to her work as a geisha in Asakusa. The repertoire performed at these events varies depending on the budget of the customer (more performers and longer performances mean a larger bill), the breadth of expertise of the various geisha involved in a given event, specific requests made by a customer, and perhaps the appropriateness of certain seasonal repertoire. One piece that is almost always performed to conclude larger *ozashiki* in Asakusa is the above-mentioned “Asakusa Meibutsu.” It is the *karyūkai’s* special local set piece of song and dance, and it is performed among this neighborhood’s geisha exclusively. It was written specially for them as part of a longer piece in 1971 by the *iemoto* (headmaster) of the *kiyomoto*.

\(^{29}\) While geisha typically perform for customers, who watch and listen as a passive audience, it is also common for knowledgeable customers to be allowed to participate actively in certain sections of geisha’s *ozashiki* performances in the spirit of communal music-making (Ibid., 62-5).
school of shamisen, Kiyomoto Umekichi, along with lyricist Nobumoto Kyoen and 
choreographer Fujima Tomoaki, to be presented at their annual large-scale stage 
performance (Asakusa Odori) that year. The shamisen genre of kiyomoto evolved mainly 
as dance music for the kabuki theater, but private contexts such as geisha's ozashiki were 
also important in its development. Stylistically, kiyomoto is recognized by its distinctive 
high-pitched nasal falsetto vocalization (uragoe), and it is usually performed using two 
shamisen and three singers. Since “Asakusa Meibutsu” does not exhibit all of these traits, 
it is not considered kiyomoto, despite having been penned by the kiyomoto iemoto, and is 
instead described as “new traditional-Japanese music” (shin-hōgaku) due to its recent date 
of composition and its modern approach to traditional aesthetics. The piece is, in some 
ways, distinctive to Asakusa, namely in its lyrical content and the execution of its dance. It 
does, however, bear significant stylistic features in common with the kabuki-related genre 
of kiyomoto, and with other song and dance genres conventionally performed by geisha in 
ozashiki throughout Japan.

Prototypical of ozashiki music in general, “Asakusa Meibutsu” is a relatively short 
song performed with a shamisen accompaniment. As is also characteristic of kiyomoto, it is 
sung in the uragoe falsetto vocal style, which the singer artfully controls in order to 
embellish the melody with technically demanding ornamentations. Unlike most kiyomoto, 
the singer is often a soloist accompanied by a single shamisen—either played by the singer 
herself, or accompanied by a second jikata geisha—with whom she sings heterophonically,

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30 Personal communication with the Asakusa kumiai, 31 March 2015.
32 Kiyomoto Umekichi penned “Wazakurabe Asaji no Nigiwai,” the longer piece of which “Asakusa Meibutsu” 
is an excerpt, under the penname Matsubara Sōfu. His compositions are described as shin-hōgaku (new 
traditional-Japanese music), and are termed Sōfu-gaku (relating to his penname) (personal communication 
with the Asakusa kumiai, 31 March 2015).
and in a staggered rather than simultaneous rhythmic relationship (See Example 8 in the Appendix). Depending on the number of performers available, the voice and shamisen parts may also be joined by a taiko, whose line rhythmically aligns with the pulse of the shamisen. The jikata perform this music to accompany a dance by one or more tachikata (dancers), in which, as is conventional in nihon buyō, the dancer's movements depict the narrative of the song's lyrics. Although it is a much newer piece, as "new traditional-Japanese music," these musical and dance characteristics are modeled on older styles, and are common in several of the Edo- and Meiji-period genres (listed above) that are practiced and performed by geisha.

While the instrumentation, vocal style and techniques, and approach to choreography in this song/dance are representative of ozashiki music performed by geisha

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asakusa meibutsu kazukazu gozaru</th>
<th>There are so many well-known things in Asakusa.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kimi wo matsuchi no yama no tsuki</td>
<td>I [await] you [at] the moonlit Matsuchiyama [temple].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yukari no nasae hanakawado</td>
<td>The inspiration for many, Hanakawado.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osanaki mune ni hanayashiki</td>
<td>Hanayashiki leaves a mark on children's hearts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binzasara ya miya dashi no</td>
<td>The shrine presents binzasara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanja matsuri wa edo no hana</td>
<td>at the Sanja Festival, the flower of Edo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keidai atari ni tatsu ichi wa</td>
<td>The market that stands around the precinct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimi to au yoru no katariyusa</td>
<td>offers things to talk about on nights when I meet you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nakademo wasurecha iya desu yo</td>
<td>Above all else, [you] mustn’t forget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asakusa geisha no kokorokki</td>
<td>the generous spirit of the Asakusa geisha.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yōi yōi, een yaa ryō</td>
<td>yōi yōi een yaa ryō</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4. The lyrics of “Asakusa Meibutsu” and their English translation. Translation by the author and Shimaoka Jun-ichi.

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33 The rhythmic disjunction between the vocal and shamisen parts is common in several song genres performed by geisha. Indeed, it is a distinctive feature of many styles traditional Japanese music. William Malm refers to this phenomenon as the "sliding door effect," and has pointed to it in, for example, festival hayashi music, nō theater music, and the nagauta of the kabuki theater and the geisha's ozashiki. [William P. Malm, Traditional Japanese Music and Musical Instruments, Revised Edition (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 2000), 60, 234, 289; William P. Malm, Nagauta: The Heart of Kabuki Music (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1963), 43].

34 Kiyomoto composers also helped create kouta in the late Edo and early Meiji periods, and so many kouta—another genre of song sung by geisha in ozashiki—also exhibit many stylistic traits in common with kiyomoto, namely the style of vocalization and melodic contour (Foreman, The Gei of Geisha: Music, Identity and Meaning, 24).
anywhere in Japan, the lyrics, and thus also the particular dance movements of “Asakusa Meibutsu,” are distinctive to, and even evocative of, this neighborhood in particular (see Figure 4 above). In performing the song, the vocalist sings of (or alludes to) many famous things of Asakusa, naming such features as Hanayashiki, Sensō-ji, Asakusa Shrine’s binzasara (wooden clapper) parade (discussed below), and Sanja Matsuri (see Map 7 for locations of the sites referenced in the song). There are reiterations of the word hana (flower) in various contexts in the lyrics (Hanayashiki and the sub-district of Hanakawado
are named, and Sanja Matsuri is referred to as “the flower of Edo”). These implicitly reference the geisha themselves, who live in a “flower town” (hanamachi) and are a part of “the flower and willow world” (karyūkai), and, like flowers, are associated with beauty and grace. The lyrics, with subtle flirtatiousness, also refer to trysts with “you” (kimi) at certain sites in the neighborhood, implying a close relationship between the listener and the geisha singer, but also musically placing the participants of the ozashiki (the geisha and the listener) out in the world of Asakusa. The song concludes by reminding us that above all of the other hallmarks of the neighborhood, we must not forget the generous spirit (kokoroiki) of the Asakusa geisha.

Seiko specializes in dance, and so in most ozashiki performances she serves as a tachikata. However, geisha are by definition multi-disciplinary artists, and so she is also intimately familiar with the instrumental and vocal performance of “Asakusa Meibutsu” and the karyūkai repertoire in general. Even non-geisha nihon buyō dancers will often learn a musical instrument in order to become familiar with the musical features that their dance

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35 Such subtle flirtatiousness is unsurprising within the playful context of ozashiki. As Foreman describes in chapter six of her monograph (2008), part of geisha’s performance involves cultivating an undercurrent of eroticism, where those women’s liminal social roles (as neither wives nor prostitutes) enable a kind of adult play (adult asobi) that carries sexual implications, but which is artfully veiled in elegance and subtlety (Ibid., 107–26).

36 The Japanese lyric in the second line, “Kimi wo matsuchi no yama no tsuki,” contains a “pivot word” (kakekotoba), which complicates the matter of translation. “Matsuchi no yama” refers to Matsuchiyama Shōden, a Buddhist temple northeast of Sensō-ji near the Sumida River. “Kimi” (you) is marked by the direct-object particle “wo,” but there is no verb in the phrase to act upon it. Instead, the noun “Matsuchi” follows “wo,” falling in the syntactical position of a verb (following the direct object), prompting the fluent listener to perceive the first two syllables of the of the temple’s name, “matsu,” as the verb “to wait” (also “matsu”). I have translated the whole line to logically incorporate both meanings of “matsu.” The use of pivot words is common in the popular song genres performed by geisha [see Liza Dalby, Little Songs of the Geisha (North Clarendon, VT: Tuttle Publishing, 2000), 13]. The Japanese is also ambiguous in terms of the subject of that line; an alternate translation is “The moon awaits you at Matsuchiyama temple.” The term “kokoroiki” in the penultimate line is quite heavy with meaning and cannot be translated directly. Incorporated in its signification are notions of a well-natured, generous, optimistic, hospitable, no-nonsense attitude. Certainly the Asakusa geisha are proud to tout their kokoroiki as a special feature of Asakusa that should not be disregarded (personal communication with Shimaoka Jun-ichi, June 2015).
embodies.\textsuperscript{37} As an experienced dancer, all aspects of this oft-performed song are very familiar to Seiko, and she coordinates the choreographed movements with the sounds of its lyrics and musical phrases with well-practiced ease.\textsuperscript{38} She knows the melody intimately, and in anticipation of the lyric mentioning the \textit{binzasara}, for instance, she uses her fan to mimic the action of playing that folk/spiritual wooden clapper instrument (Video 6, 1:00-1:10).\textsuperscript{39} While carrying on the prescribed refined footwork, she “plays” the fan as a \textit{binzasara}, holding it by its sturdy guards on each end, the head pointing downward and the leaves pointing up, and proceeds to smoothly open and close it in time with the pulse of the \textit{shamisen}'s melody (Images 96 and 97). To portray Sanja Matsuri, she acts out that event’s most iconic practice, the carrying of a \textit{mikoshi} (portable shrine) through the neighborhood (Video 6, 1:15-1:28). She places her open fan horizontally upon her left shoulder, grasping one end with both hands and with the leaves pointed away from her neck. As the \textit{jikata} sings the lyrics referring to the festival, Seiko stoops and performs a stylized stagger—in


\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Nihon buyō} dancers like Seiko learn formalized body movements called \textit{kata} to aid in the memorization and embodiment of pieces. Tomie Hahn referenced Japanese philosopher Yuasa Yasuo’s writings about the traditional Japanese understanding of and approach to practices of the body in explaining how \textit{nihon buyō} dancers internalize \textit{kata}: “when there is repeated training in the practice of performing techniques, the body-mind is disciplined, then the state of the conscious movement changes into one which the hands, legs, and body unconsciously move of themselves.” [Yasuo Yuasa, \textit{The Body, Self-Cultivation, and Ki-Energy} (Albany: State University of New York, 1993), 31. Cited in Hahn, \textit{Sensational Knowledge: Embodying Culture through Japanese Dance}, 61].

\textsuperscript{39} Video 6 was recorded in the small performance hall in the Asakusa \textit{kenban}, where Seiko (center) is joined by two other dancers. I do not have access to a video of Seiko performing “Asakusa Meibutsu” as a solo dancer in a private \textit{ozashiki} setting, but for reference to another Asakusa geisha performing the dance in that context, see \url{https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=allU03CB4n0I}. This second video was recorded in an \textit{ochaya} (Sabō Hana no Tsuji) located just a few blocks from the Asakusa \textit{kenban}.

A \textit{binzasara} is a clapper type of idiophone comprised of many (sometimes over a hundred) small, thin, wooden or bamboo slats strung together with a long cord. It is played by grasping it at both ends and striking the slats together with a quick snapping motion of the wrists. Today, \textit{binzasara} are played in Asakusa each year on March 17 as part of a festival tradition with roots in the Edo Period [for a detailed history and musical analysis of this practice, see Gerald Groemer, “Binzasara: Music and Dance at Sensōji in Edo/Tōkyō,” 2011 \textit{Yearbook for Traditional Music} 43 (2011): 37–61. For a video reference of this instrument being played in that context, see 1:30-2:00 at \url{https://youtu.be/655-SwBDm_M}].
time with the music—under the imaginary weight of the simulated **mikoshi** (Images 98 and 99). And at the lyrical line about praying for sound health and safety at Sensō-ji, she dances the act of paying homage at a temple altar (Video 6, 1:40-1:50). She contracts her fan and fluidly turns away from the audience, brings her hands together near her face, and, with
legs delicately bent and in time with the shamisen and vocal lines, bows her head in prayer.40

Performing “Asakusa Meibutsu” and other pieces from the geisha’s repertoire is, for Seiko, an opportunity to perform the style of dance that she loves, and to which she has devoted her life. In the context of ozashiki, such performances are also staged to entertain customers, and to earn the money that supports her performing-arts lifestyle. Seiko and the other Asakusa geisha perform “Asakusa Meibutsu,” in particular, as the special closing piece in ozashiki. Its aesthetics conform to ozashiki musical conventions, through which they contribute to the spirit of traditional-Japanese, formal, yet playful entertainment fostered at such events. By evoking the neighborhood through the narrative of its lyrics and dance, however, those distinctive aspects of the performance are used to musically mark ozashiki in this neighborhood, with performances by this karyūkai, as not only traditional and entertaining, but as particularly Asakusa affairs. “Asakusa Meibutsu” is one example of ozashiki music/dance, a repertoire that Seiko has identified as central to her identity, and to her conception of Asakusa. She encounters the world, and thus the particular urban amalgam that is Asakusa, with this music at the center of her consciousness.

ii. Seiko’s entertainment musikscape

At any given time, Seiko hears and is conscious of only a fraction of the sounds that are audible in the neighborhood as she lives her life as a geisha in the karyūkai. Even at its most expansive, her musikscape in Asakusa remains quite narrow. She explained that the

40 Throughout this dance, the geisha move with knees bent and legs and knees turned inward, the posture adopted for portraying female characters in nihon buyō (Hahn, Sensational Knowledge: Embodying Culture through Japanese Dance, 63).
nature of her role as a geisha significantly structures the ways that she is able to experience the neighborhood as a particular kind of place:

[Asakusa] has a certain liveliness (kakki), doesn’t it? But really, I don’t know any part of Tokyo but Asakusa. I got off the train from Niigata fourteen years ago and I have just been here... We are geisha 365 days a year, 24 hours a day, and so we don’t really have any completely free time. Even if there are no appointments listed at the kenban office, the phone could ring at any time [to tell us], “a customer called, it’s time to go to ozashiki.”

With such a demanding career, she has had very little opportunity to consider Asakusa in relation to other parts of the city. As a result, her understanding of the neighborhood is informed almost entirely from the inside, rather than by comparison to other parts of Tokyo. Sonic Scene 1 described above, therefore, is a manifestation of Seiko’s Asakusa musikscape at its most panoramic, since neighborhood activities like Kinryū no Mai are some of the most significant opportunities for her to encounter and actively participate in the life of neighborhood beyond the hanamachi.

She described the geisha’s participation in Kinryū no Mai to be in the spirit of local community and collective spirituality that is inherent in such neighborhood events: “It’s about locality, I think. We [geisha] are in the same area, and of course we want to ask for the good favor (go-en) of Kannon.” Thus, even her civic engagement outside of the hanamachi is informed by her identity as a geisha. She is involved in the event as a musician, and her participation is organized through an established relationship between the Asakusa geisha community and Sensō-ji. Nevertheless, such events provide opportunities to be involved physically, musically, and socially in the greater neighborhood beyond the karyūkai.

At Kinryū no Mai, Seiko is able to come into contact with and participate in many of the soundscapes in Asakusa that she normally does not have access to in her usual sphere
of activity. The geisha’s yatai is pulled down Nakamise Street, from Kaminarimon toward the precinct’s square, and the sounds of their music intermingle with the hawking voices of the many shopkeepers there. The dragon’s dance takes place in Sensō-ji’s precinct, where tourists and locals—talking in loud voices—throng to witness the captivating scene. From their yatai, the geisha even sell small souvenirs to tourists when they are not performing. The shouts of revelers at Hanayashiki do not cease for such events, and they are audible, as always, in the precinct’s daytime hours. In addition, the geisha sit in attendance while Sensō-ji clergy members, amplified by a P.A. system, explain the spiritual legend concerning the golden dragon and its significance to the temple. Furthermore, the festival music that they make as part of this spiritual event is regarded as peripheral to the geisha’s most central concerns as professional performing artists and ozashiki entertainers, and so Seiko sees it as constituting a soundscape that is separate from her everyday karyūkai sonic sphere.

Despite all of the soundscape overlappings that she experiences as a participant in such events, Seiko did not describe the neighborhood in terms of any of this variety to which she has unquestionably been exposed. It is unlikely, however, that she could remain unaware of certain aspects of Asakusa during the fourteen years that she has lived in the neighborhood. Participating in its dynamic festivals and encountering its crowds whenever she crosses Kototoi Street, she certainly must know that Sensō-ji is a center of activity in the area. And anyone coming into that active region surrounding the temple is sure to notice the boisterous and towering Hanayashiki, the neighborhood’s many performance venues, and certainly the copious souvenir shops, diverse retail stores, restaurants, and pubs that line many of Asakusa’s streets and alleyways. Nevertheless, Seiko mentioned
none of these things when talking of her experience of the neighborhood, which she continually framed in terms of her position as a geisha-performing-artist. After asking her to reflect upon the unique local quality of Asakusa, her answer to one question in particular was very telling of the musikscape she experiences, even on the broader scale of the neighborhood as a whole. She explained, "Well, because I am living in it, the music of ozashiki [is characteristic of Asakusa]. Nagauta, kouta... I think ozashiki music [is the most characteristically Asakusa], because it is always flowing constantly, I have a certain feeling about it. It’s difficult to explain in words.”

Because Seiko’s life is dominated by the activities of her karyūkai performing arts community, she unquestionably understands her own social position in Asakusa as fundamentally defined by her role as a geisha. In some very significant ways, the dedicated lifestyle of a geisha means isolation from mainstream society, with personal priorities that are narrowly focused on the arts and entertainment that define that social role. Seiko’s larger Asakusa musikscape, therefore, is constructed on these terms. For her, despite the diverse hum of the neighborhood, Asakusa is a place of ozashiki music.

Ozashiki like the one in Sonic Scene 2 are therefore the physical and socio-musical settings through which she understands her own identity as well as the nature of the neighborhood she inhabits. The experience of place fostered there is intentionally quite constrained, as ozashiki are by nature very exclusive. Defined so significantly by exclusivity, ozashiki are meant to be sonically isolated as well. In the Asakusa karyūkai, the physical and social separation of ozashiki is heightened due to the division between the rather tranquil blocks of the hanamachi and the bustling, touristic section of the neighborhood south of Kototoi Street. The construction of ochaya and ryōtei further imply segregation by
visually containing the action of the event, even if they may not always be able to completely prevent sound from flowing from banquet room to street, and vice versa. The geisha’s traditional, elegant music and dance play an important role in fostering the special sense of place, and they perform it expressly for their paying customers. Because these performances significantly define her career and lifestyle, Seiko is deeply invested in the music and dance, and she works to keenly focus her musikscape during performances in order to present her art at the highest standard. Since geisha are both professional artists and hired entertainers, however, their priorities in ozashiki do not always completely conform to those of their customers. Seiko explained that, for instance, unruly drunken patrons do occasionally misbehave, disrupting her focus from her performance.

[In ozashiki], people are drinking and enjoying each others’ company... our aim is to loosen them up somewhat with alcohol and assist them in their business interactions—to set the right tone, warming their spirits and allowing them to do what they want to do. [Ozashiki] aren’t really my recitals, so even if [customers] are talking while I am dancing and performing, I don’t really pay attention to them. [But] it’s not as if we were performing for an hour or two, it’s only for ten minutes. So we do sometimes think it would be nice if they would have minimal etiquette and pay attention to us for that performance, but we don’t demand it of them. We are offering gei (art) as well-mannered adults, and so we would like them to appreciate what we’re offering. But since it is a place that is serving alcohol, we don’t get angry with them if they don’t.

As an accomplished artist, Seiko aims, in part, to imbue ozashiki with a sophisticated sense of place shaped by the geisha’s gei, albeit with the recognition that the paying customers are ultimately the ones in control. Her musikscape must be flexible to accommodate their behaviors. Regardless of the etiquette (or lack thereof) of some individuals, Seiko works to provide all of them with an enjoyable ozashiki experience, constructing an exclusive soundscape informed by her music and dance.
"Asakusa Meibutsu" is one piece that she and the other geisha perform to this end. With its traditional instrumentation and aesthetics, it is in many ways typical of their repertoire. Performing it helps to foster an ideal ozashiki sense of place. Its distinctively Asakusa lyrics and choreography also serve to musically mark the ozashiki performed in this karyūkai with a sense of neighborhood locality. More than merely regionally distinctive, this song-dance also musically brings notions of Asakusa as a whole into the otherwise-segregated ozashiki space. By virtue of Seiko's dance, coordinated with the singer's ornamented vocals and the regular pulse of the shamisen line, trysts are kept at moonlit temples, binzasara are played, mikoshi are carried at Sanja Matsuri, and prayers are offered at Sensō-ji. While maintaining an atmosphere of private, formal, traditional fun, Seiko and the other geisha conceptually transgress some of the ozashiki's sonic isolation from its surroundings with their performance of "Asakusa Meibutsu," and place it in the matrix of the larger neighborhood's soundscape montage. In such a time and place, her musikscape is at once confined to a small ozashiki room but also broadly inclusive of Asakusa's greater diversity.
Chapter 5
Tourism and Tradition

“Asakusa is not like Kyoto; its traditionality is not real. It’s like a toy, it’s cheap... [But Asakusa] does have matsuri, and traditional things have strong roots here.”
- Oshow

Interlude

Clink-clink, clink-clink. A strong wind is blowing on a cool spring day, and the soft metallic clatter of the wind chimes (fūtaku) that hang on the corners of each roof of Sensō-ji’s pagoda carry faintly through the precinct.¹ With her busy schedule on her mind, it is unimportant to the geisha, Seiko, and she takes no notice of the windswept chimes as she passes near the temple yard. San-yūtei, a local retired photographer and blogger, hears the ringing and pauses to take a picture of the pagoda. The jangling sound of the wind chimes would be welcome, he thinks, if this were a warm summer day. In this chilly weather, it just adds insult to injury.² Cynthia Lu, an American tourist in the neighborhood for the day, notices the sound briefly as she and her sister come upon the pagoda, but the teeming crowd that fills the square diverts her attention is diverted almost immediately. With so many new sights and sounds to take in, the wind chimes become a disregarded background

¹ It is common practice throughout Asia to hang wind chimes on pagodas and other sacred buildings. It is believed that the sound of the chimes attracts beneficent spirits and/or repels evil ones. ² In Japan, the sound of wind chimes is associated with cool temperatures; as the wind blows the chime into ringing, the sound and the breeze both cool the people who can feel and hear it. See San-yūtei Ahomaro’s daily blog at http://www.edo.net/edo/, accessed 16 July 2015.
noise as she eagerly explores the temple precinct.

I. Tourism Musiking in Asakusa

Like Cynthia Lu, a great many people who come to Asakusa each day encounter the neighborhood and its soundscape montage as tourists. Cynthia is a young Chinese-American woman who visited Asakusa as part of a sightseeing vacation, and so her musikscape in the neighborhood is anchored by the trope of tourism. Spending only a few hours there during a one-week stay in Tokyo in May of 2015, her knowledge of Asakusa before visiting was formed mainly by the information she encountered in her guidebook and on Internet searches of tourist destinations in Tokyo. However, many parts of the neighborhood are designed to attract and guide naïve foreign tourists like Cynthia through its streets and shops, and so her experience of it was determined in part by those factors.

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3 Cynthia Lu visited Asakusa with her sister, Patricia. Because the two women share the same surname, I will refer to both of them using their given names to avoid conflating the two.
Unlike my other consultants, music was not a significant part of Cynthia’s encounter with the neighborhood. As was emphasized in Chapter 1, however, diverse sounds—both musical and non-musical—have meaning for people as they negotiate their sonic senses of place in a given location. With limited time spent in Asakusa and a comparatively narrow understanding of the neighborhood, Cynthia carved out a sonic experience there that was informed primarily by her touristic priorities, revolving mainly around the sound of her own blended use of Chinese and English languages.

Cynthia was a fairly typical foreign tourist in Japan. In the country on vacation with her older sister, Patricia, she had studied the basics of the Japanese language only for a very short time in preparation for the trip. The two made efficient use of their time in East Asia: after a short stop in Seoul, South Korea to shop for cosmetics, the two women flew to Osaka and proceeded to sightsee in that city, Kyoto, and Kobe, before heading to Tokyo. In Tokyo, they stayed in Shibuya, the busy, fashionable, and up-to-the-minute neighborhood on the Yamanote side of the city. With Shibuya as their home base, they explored many other parts of Tokyo, both near and far. One of these was Asakusa, which she visited only briefly among many other areas of interest in an effort to see as many different sites as possible.

This was Cynthia’s first trip to Japan; her only other visits to East Asia prior to this vacation were to sightsee in her family’s homeland of China. Her parents immigrated to the United States in the late 1980s, when older-sister Patricia was a small child. Cynthia was subsequently born in a small city in Indiana in 1993. Shortly thereafter, the family moved to the suburbs of Chicago, where she spent most of her childhood years. The Lus spoke Mandarin Chinese at home, and so both girls learned it as their first language, and Cynthia has memories of learning English through special games that her mother played with her.
each night when she was very young. Later, when she was old enough, she entered mainstream American public school where her English skills became even stronger. She is, consequently, conversationally fluent in both Mandarin and English as an adult. She explained, however, that she is able to pronounce Mandarin most smoothly, but that her vocabulary in English is much stronger. As a result, she finds speaking purely in one language or the other somewhat taxing, and considers mixing the two to be the most comfortable mode of speaking. She calls this combination of languages “Chinglish,” (a portmanteau of “Chinese” and “English”), and it is the primary manner in which she talks with her sister.

Although Cynthia had rather typical middle-class American upbringing in the Chicago area, her family, a bit unusually, kept various birds (ducks, quails, and chickens) as pets in their suburban backyard, and Cynthia’s general love of birds is well known among her friends. Later, as a young adult, she attended the University of Michigan where she earned her bachelor’s degree in electrical engineering with a concentration in digital signal processing. Notably, she also explained that her interest in engineering, in addition to her general love of Japanese cuisine, played a part in attracting her to Japan because she is fascinated by Vocaloid, a voice synthesizer created by the Japanese software developer Kenmochi Hideki. Her decision to actually visit the country of Vocaloid and sushi was the most recent adventure she has embarked upon with her sister, as the two have a close relationship and enjoy spending time together traveling.

Like many tourists, Cynthia spent her time in Asakusa exploring the most famous sites first. She and Patricia walked down Nakamise Street and explored its shops, stopped briefly at Sensō-ji, and then went on to explore the surrounding area. Certain social and
physical circumstances enabled their easy passage through the neighborhood along this route, and afforded them particular sonic experiences there. Firstly, Nakamise Street is lined with scores of souvenir shops and it is the thoroughfare that leads up to Sensō-ji, so it typically attracts a large number of tourists. For this reason, it is one of many streets in Asakusa that is open only to pedestrians, since vehicular traffic would be unsafe or impossible due to the large crowds. Secondly, the open nature of Sensō-ji’s precinct and Main Hall allowed the sisters, along with the multitude of other tourists and locals, to easily stroll through that area. Since there is no fencing wall around the temple, they were able to leave Sensō-ji by another route rather than retracing their steps back down Nakamise Street. Because most tourists tend to flock around Sensō-ji and the shopping streets that cater to them near the temple, the density of pedestrian visitors in other areas of the neighborhood tends to be much lower, and those areas can therefore be much quieter.

The sisters meandered and explored some of these less-frequented areas on foot, stopping to spend money at any shops or businesses that caught their attention, including a bird-themed café that roused Cynthia’s enthusiasm in particular. There were times in Asakusa when Cynthia’s musikscape was rather focused, incorporating, for instance, only the sounds of her Chinglish conversation with her sister and the ambient sounds in a single souvenir shop. At other times, it expanded to include a greater variety of sounds from other streets and shops throughout the neighborhood, allowing her to feel more broadly emplaced in Asakusa at large. Nevertheless, Cynthia’s experience of sound in Asakusa overall was limited to public places where she was often surrounded by other tourists, and where shopkeepers welcomed her and other sightseers as potential paying customers.
Below I describe a series of scenes from Cynthia’s tourism musikscape, which I label Sonic Scenes 1 and 2. Sonic Scene 1 is the slightly broader of the two, as it incorporates her experience while walking outside on Nakamise Street. Sonic Scene 2 is narrower, taking into account only her experience of sound and place inside a single souvenir shop. After presenting these two Sonic Scenes of Cynthia’s entertainment musikscape in the neighborhood, I will go on to analyze them with reference to her musiking practice, the nature of her agency, her relationships to Asakusa’s cultural tropes, the diverse range of sounds she encounters there, and finally her changeable sense of place that arises from these factors.

**Sonic Scene 1:**

*Cynthia’s Tourism Musikscape on Nakamise Street*

On Nakamise the commotion of the crowd is constant on this sunny Monday morning. The buzzing of many conversations fills the air, and people occasionally call out to one another, punctuating the steady din with louder shouts. Feet shuffle and clack over the stone walkway and digital cameras click and beep as tourists take photos to remember their visit to this famous place. Cynthia has just arrived at Kaminarimon, and she and Patricia are marveling at the bright color of its massive paper lantern.

“*Wa! Hào dà a! Zhè ge guidebook shuō tā zài zhè lǐ hěn jiǔ le. (Wow! So big! The guidebook says it’s been here for a long time.) Hurry up and take a picture!*”

“This place is sort of like Kyoto, would you say? So flat [no skyscrapers].”

A rickshaw runner interrupts their exchange, addressing them in Japanese and then in English: “*Konnichi wal Jinrikisha ni norimasen ka? Hello! How about a tour of Asakusa in a rickshaw?*” Uninterested in spending their money on this, they shake their heads with a
“no thank you” and pass him by before snapping a couple more photos of the Tokyo landmark. Excited to explore further, they weave through the crowd flocking around the temple gate. The two stoop to pass under the lantern and then begin to make their way down Nakamise Street.

Constantly noticing new and interesting things, the two young women chat to each other almost unceasingly, Cynthia in her hybrid language of Chinglish, and Patricia replying mainly in English. All around them the mostly-Japanese crowd speaks in their own native language. Already the second week of their trip, Cynthia is mostly accustomed to being immersed in this language that she does not understand, and she is easily able to give little

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4 Cynthia explained that, although both of them speak Chinese at home with their parents, when the sisters are together, Patricia only uses English to speak to her because she thinks bystanders will find it strange to hear Chinglish. Cynthia, on the other hand, is unconcerned about such judgment from strangers and mixes the languages in the way that feels most comfortable for her.
regard to the strangers’ voices around her. The particular sound of her own language(s) that she speaks with her sister is not normally something that Cynthia consciously thinks about, but her awareness of it is abruptly piqued as they pass by a group of Australian people speaking English. Suddenly understanding the strangers’ words, she also becomes a bit self-conscious that the sound of the words that pour from her own lips also differs from almost everyone else’s around her. She does not dwell on this thought for long, however, and carries on chatting with her sister about their new surroundings.

**Sonic Scene 2: Cynthia’s Tourism Musikscape in a Nakamise Souvenir Shop**

Still out on the sidewalk, Buddhist flags flutter on the front awning of a long row of souvenir shops. Under each flag, a red paper lantern swings in the breeze, emblazoned with words announcing that today is a special holy day at Sensō-ji. Not understanding the symbolism of the flags or the words on the lanterns, Cynthia is only struck by the vibrant nature of the streetscape and pays no attention to the sounds of those objects moving in the wind. Instead, she and Patricia are attracted by a large display of colorful charms and toys nearby. They squeeze their way into one tiny souvenir shop. Although still audible in the open shop, the hum of the crowded street fades as the shopkeeper calls out, “Irasshaimase,” a little nonchalantly upon their arrival. Although she does not know the literal meaning of the word, Cynthia understands that the woman is welcoming them, having now heard many shopkeepers say this. Preoccupied with their shopping, the sisters coo together over the toys, deliberating as to which they might bring home as gifts for friends and relatives. “Irasshaimase,” the shopkeeper welcomes another customer into the cramped space. Cynthia approaches the shopkeeper with the items she has chosen to purchase. The
shopkeeper punches the keys on a large calculator and silently turns it to show Cynthia the amount of the total charge. Cynthia smiles and nods, handing a ¥1,000 note to the woman. The shopkeeper returns the purchased toys to Cynthia, now neatly taped into a colorful paper envelope, along with her change, adding a curt “arigatō gozaimasu.” Cynthia nods and smiles in mute but courteous response.

She and her sister then shuffle through the narrow space between the other customer and the souvenir display to make their way back to the street. Out in the sunshine, the crowd still buzzes past. “Oh my God, Yer (Cynthia’s nickname for her sister)!!” she calls out, using only English in her sudden excitement. “Look at the bunnies ISSOCUTE! Let’s eat there! Ahh, they sell dango (rice dumplings)!!” She points to a sweets shop across the street adorned with a pink rabbit logo. Her sister also squeals in excitement, and they begin weaving their way through the flock of tourists to investigate this happy find.

**Analysis**

Cynthia chose to visit Asakusa as a Chinese-American sightseer in Japan, seeking it out mainly because it was marketed as an interesting place in her guidebook. She indicated that she considers it to be an older neighborhood in Tokyo and she understands Sensō-ji and Nakamise Street to be worthwhile sites to see. Unlike the typical tourist, however, she also thinks of Asakusa as the home of a bird café, which she and her sister stumbled upon on a quiet side street after leaving the temple precinct. Her sonic experiences in Asakusa were mainly grounded in the trope of tourism as she interacted with and experienced the neighborhood from the perspective of a young Chinese-American tourist (with an uncommon interest in birds). She saw her role in Asakusa to be seeing, hearing, and tasting things that are new to her; buying souvenirs, snacks, and experiences; and enjoying time
spent with her sister. With a limited understanding of the neighborhood’s larger cultural identity, many of the sounds that she encountered there had little significance for her, and she consequently disregarded a great deal of them. The sounds that had the greatest importance for her—the ones through which she processed her experience in Asakusa, and through which others interpreted her role there—were, therefore, the sounds of her conversations with her sister.

i. The sound of Chinglish

As the child of two Chinese immigrants to the United States, Cynthia’s use of language is distinctive, and it distinguished her as a non-Japanese visitor in Asakusa. The sound of her own Chinglish-language conversations was a sonic manifestation of her foreign tourist identity because it anchored her Asakusa musikscape as she and her sister talked about the sights and sounds of the neighborhood and the goods and services they might purchase there. It was essential in communicating comfortably with her travel companion, to make plans and discuss their experiences. But it also marked her as a tourist, and strangers presumed her to be a consumer who would be interested in spending money on the goods and services marketed to sightseers in the neighborhood.

The term “Chinglish” is perhaps more often used to refer to a form of Chinese Pidgin English—that is, a simplified and/or modified form of English spoken (or written) by native Chinese speakers not yet fluent in English. Cynthia’s mode of speaking, in contrast, is more accurately described as a form of code-switching. Code-switching is manner of speech in which the speaker(s) alternate between two or more languages in the context of a single conversation, while maintaining the syntax and phonology of each. Rather than a

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language simplification made in order to communicate when speakers do not share a common language—like forms of pidgin—code-switching is instead more common among fluently multilingual individuals like Cynthia and Patricia.\(^6\)

Although the mode of speaking that Cynthia and her sister use is a particular manner of code-switching between Mandarin and English, the two source languages are still recognizable to people conversationally fluent in them. This was evidenced by the fact that various Japanese shopkeepers addressed the two women in either English or Mandarin after hearing them speak to one another in Chinglish. Vendors in Asakusa and at tourist destinations around the world are accustomed to hearing many visitors speaking in English or Mandarin, and many have learned to speak one or both languages to varying degrees in order to communicate with customers. Cynthia noted that if they did not address her in their native Japanese, salespeople in Asakusa and at other tourist destinations she visited in Japan most often addressed her in English.

English is one of the most commonly spoken languages on Earth, either as a native or second language, and thus a global lingua franca.\(^7\) As of 2006, there were an estimated 400 million native English speakers, and around one billion people studying it or speaking it as a second language. It is by far the most commonly studied second language in Japan,

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It is practically impossible to know how many people speak Chinglish in the manner of the Lu sisters. However, considering only that there were approximately 3.8 million Chinese and Taiwanese Americans in the United States as of 2010—who have varying degrees of fluency in English and in Mandarin—it is safe to speculate that there are a great many who can and do code-switch in this way (Asian Pacific American Chamber of Commerce, “Asian Pacific American Stats & Facts,” [http://www.apacc.net/asian-pacific-american-stats-and-facts](http://www.apacc.net/asian-pacific-american-stats-and-facts), accessed 15 July 2015).

and it has even become a compulsory subject for Japanese school children as of 2011. It is therefore unsurprising that many workers in the Japanese tourism industry (and elsewhere) have some proficiency in English to communicate with international customers.

Cynthia also observed that several other salespeople spoke to her in Mandarin. This is also unsurprising, since Mandarin is by far the most prevalent language on Earth, with an estimated 955 million native speakers. It is the official language of the People’s Republic of China, the world’s most populous country, as well as of the Republic of China (Taiwan), and it is one of four official languages in Singapore. With Japan’s close proximity to the Asian mainland, a great number of tourists and other visitors to the country are Mandarin-speakers. The abundance of English and Mandarin—in addition to other languages common among contemporary international tourists—heard in the streets and shops of Asakusa, therefore, distinguishes it as a popular tourist destination.

ii. Cynthia’s tourism musikscape

Although their sounds were central to her activities as a tourist, the English and Mandarin languages comprised only a small portion of the many sounds Cynthia encountered while in Asakusa. At any given time, she heard and was conscious of only a fraction of the sounds in the neighborhood as she encountered it as a Chinese-American tourist. She navigated its overlapping soundscapes, constructing a fluctuating tourism

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10 Although there are a multitude of languages and dialects spoken throughout the PRC, ROC, and Singapore, Mandarin is by far the most common. Visitors to Japan from those countries numbered nearly five and a half million in 2014, making up 40.8% of the tourists to visit the country that year (Japan National Tourism Organization, “2014 Foreign Visitors & Japanese Departures” (Japan National Tourism Organization, 2015), http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/ttp/sta/PDF/E2014.pdf.)
musikscape for herself that changed in breadth and depth depending on the time, and her location and action.

To analyze this process, let us first consider Cynthia’s experience of sonic emplacement in Sonic Scene 1 of her musikscape described above. In Sonic Scene 1, she and Patricia arrived to Nakamise Street and took pictures at Kaminarimon before beginning to walk down the pedestrian thoroughfare. The specific sounds that most caught Cynthia’s attention out on the street were the sounds of spoken English and Mandarin, although the Japanese language was also spoken all around her as well. The conversation that was most important to her was, of course, the one she carried on almost continually with her sister. She noted that Nakamise Street was bustling, mentioning that the sounds of the crowd—of people talking together, of feet on the pavement, and of cameras clicking pictures—were noticeable there. She did not mention, however, certain other audible sounds, such as the traffic buzzing constantly on Kaminarimon Street, or the sounds of any of the religious paraphernalia (such as the fluttering Buddhist flags) that inevitably remains part of the scene on Nakamise Street. For these reasons, I infer that Cynthia considers the sounds of tourists and vendors around Kaminarimon and on Nakamise Street to constitute a soundscape. Those sounds contribute to—and spring from—the significance of that area as a site where commercial tourism is conducted.

Because of her priorities as a tourist, Cynthia could pay little regard to the sounds extraneous to her own immediate concerns and expectations. She disregarded the traffic sounds without much difficulty since she was walking in a pedestrian area where the traffic was not a danger. It was also easy for her to mostly tune out conversations taking place around her in languages she did not understand, and to give most of her attention to talking
with her sister. They spoke spontaneously, participating in the vibrant tourism soundscape around them. Cynthia felt comfortable doing so, sensing that their activity and the sounds they made were well-integrated in this scene. Her comfort level changed slightly when they encountered some other tourists speaking English. Coming upon the strangers’ conversation, she became more aware of the sounds around her, expanding slightly her sonic sense of place as she reflected that the sound of her own conversation was also different from most others’ around her.

The sisters’ Chinglish-language conversation was also heard by other people nearby, some of whom engaged with the two women in ways informed by an assumption that they were foreigners who could likely not speak Japanese. For instance, a rickshaw runner peddled to them in English, not only adjusting his own selling tactics in order to communicate effectively, but also taking their non-Japanese language to be an indication that they would be interested in a tourism service like his. Cynthia’s musikscape in Sonic Scene 1 is defined by these sounds of the street, giving her a sense of place in Asakusa that is rooted in her status as an English-/Chinese-speaking tourist, and her awareness that the neighborhood is a popular destination among foreign sightseers like herself.

In Sonic Scene 2, Cynthia’s musikscape became more focused. In the beginning of that scenario, she was still out on the sidewalk of Nakamise Street where, amid the colorful visuals of the streetscape, she gave little attention to the fluttering sounds of the Buddhist flags and paper lanterns blowing in the wind. Not knowledgeable of the religious meanings in their imagery, she considered them only cheerful and pretty, and otherwise paid little attention to them. Her musikscape remained focused on matters of touristic exploration
and could not expand to include ideas about spirituality as it might for others with different social backgrounds and education.

When she stepped into the small souvenir shop, her sonic sense of place narrowed. In the confines of three enclosing walls (the fourth side of the rectangular shop is open to the street during business hours), Cynthia understood that she was in a certain *place*, physically defined by the building, and socially defined by the buying and selling of the charms and trinkets on display there. Sonically confirming this, the shopkeeper inside the shop welcomed the sisters with the customary Japanese vendor’s greeting. The sounds of the crowds on the street became less prominent, and the only significant sounds inside the shop, besides the welcoming call of the shopkeeper, were those of the Lus’ own voices in conversation. Still concerned with touristic notions of discovery and gift buying, Cynthia focused her attention on her shopping and easily tuned out all other unrelated sounds, carving a very constrained tourism musikscape.

Like the rickshaw runner out on the street, the shopkeeper heard the sounds of the sisters’ Chinglish-language conversation and adjusted her retail methods to communicate effectively with them. Whereas she would likely simply have spoken the price of the souvenirs to a Japanese customer, she assumed Cynthia would not understand, and so she communicated the number visually using a calculator. Cynthia then also assumed that the shopkeeper did not speak English or Mandarin, and so did not attempt to communicate with her verbally, choosing instead to use facial expressions and body language. In this way, Cynthia and the shopkeeper participated in the shop’s soundscape in a dynamic way, using sight and sound to learn about one another’s language proficiency, and adapting their
communication strategies based on that new knowledge to carry out their retail/touristic exchange.

After the scenario described in Sonic Scene 2, the sisters left Sensō-ji’s precinct and began to explore Asakusa’s other streets. In doing so, Cynthia was able to expand her musikscape in the neighborhood as it came to be informed by a broader experience of its geography and its sounds. They walked through the covered shopping arcade of Nishi-San-Dō, down a quiet street flanking the Asakusa WINS building, and strolled around Rokku Broadway before stopping to shop at the ROX department store (see Map 8). With this wider perspective, Cynthia was able to describe Asakusa on a larger scale:

Asakusa reminded me more of Kyoto. Still city-like, but less (sic) people and flashy lights. It seemed to be the “old” district of Tokyo and I can see why that is… When I say “old” in this context, I mean perhaps 1980s- or 1970s-vibe old… What I saw of the shopping arcades [in Asakusa] the architecture looked a few decades old… In my mind now, the shopping arcades seemed yellowing, very quiet, and though we were there in the afternoon, it looked as if everyone was taking a siesta. However, Nakeshima (sic) Street and the temple were very alive and bustling. I guess when I say “old” in this case, I also mean unlike Shibuya or Shinjuku or Akihabara etc. Asakusa didn’t really have skyscrapers or busy traffic walks… [Outside of the market], everywhere was pretty much silent. Almost a bit creepy. But it was also a Monday afternoon.

Indeed, on a typical weekday afternoon many of the areas Cynthia and Patricia walked after leaving Sensō-ji are free of many pedestrians and the sounds created at most nearby businesses do not issue out into the streets. In addition, there were a number of reasons Cynthia was not able to incorporate any existing inaudible “sounds” into her musikscape. Firstly, she had little knowledge about the cultural identity of the neighborhood outside of its tourism, and so she was unable to identify the many vestiges of sound and music related to Asakusa’s other tropes that she surely came across. Additionally, she did not understand much of the visual imagery used in signage and architecture that may have given her some clues of this. And lastly, she could not read Japanese well enough to learn more about local
happenings by reading any of the posters, advertisements, or storefronts that they passed. For instance, she did not recognize that the façade, decorations, and signage on the Nishi-San-Dō shopping arcade are evocative of kabuki theater. Her sonic sense of place and her understanding of Asakusa’s soundscape were, therefore, essentially informed only by an impression that the neighborhood was touristy, and that it was older and much quieter than other areas that she had visited in Tokyo.
The particularities of Cynthia’s background and interests directed the sisters’ action and attention most strongly at the end of their time in Asakusa, when they came upon a bird café in another of the neighborhood’s shopping arcades. This is an establishment where customers can pay an amount of money to interact with live birds of various species—mostly types of parrots, small hawks, and owls—to see them up-close, and even to invite them to walk on their arms and shoulders. Although the sounds of the birds did not reach the street, Cynthia immediately noticed the picture of owls and parakeets on the store’s front signboard and the English words reading “Owl and Parrot café.” The sisters could not pass up this unique opportunity; they paid the fee for Cynthia to spend a half hour of bliss with birds perched on her and all around. The café was filled with the chirps and squawks of exotic birds and the flutter of many flapping wings, sounds that the vast majority of people with any considerable knowledge of Asakusa would not normally associate with that neighborhood. The sounds were also not the central aspects of Cynthia’s

experience in the café, so she did not comment on them as much as the general charm and friendliness of the birds she had the chance to interact with there.

Certainly, the two sisters continued conversing in Chinglish in the café, bringing the sonic manifestation of their tourist status into that environment. Although such a generic bird café would be considered on the very fringe of the activities that normally define Asakusa, for Cynthia, that rare experience was the highlight of her time in the neighborhood and the memory that she thinks of most fondly. The choice of an entrepreneur to open such a curious business in Asakusa brought an exotic bird soundscape into the neighborhood, where, because of Cynthia’s unique interests and willingness to pay the necessary fee, it became a part of her tourism musikscape as well.

**Interlude**

“The fire’s in their eyes and their words are really clear, so beat it, just beat it.” The sound of Michael Jackson’s 1983 hit drifts through the crowd on Shin-Nakamise Street; it plays unobtrusively from hidden speakers mounted up and down the shopping arcade. Cynthia disregards the familiar American song as her attention is caught by a cute and furry noise-making playthings at a small toy shop. For Sakai, a clerk at a nearby shoe store, the song is a welcome change; she is tired of listening to the cheesy pop orchestral music that has been playing here most of the day. And although he knows the song well, for Fukui Kōdai, a local restaurateur, the sound goes unnoticed as he hurries quickly through the shopping arcade toward his restaurant where the lunchtime hour is about to begin.

**II. Traditional Musiking in Asakusa**

Fukui is an Asakusa resident who fashions a musikscape from Asakusa’s soundscape montage that is anchored by the trope of tradition. Like Tanaka and Seiko, Fukui lives and
works in Asakusa, and spends the vast majority of his time there. He is a restaurateur and a master player of *Tsugaru-jamisen*, and he thus crafts a personal sonic experience for himself that helps him achieve and maintain his position as a successful small-business owner and accomplished musician.

Fukui is a *Tsugaru-jamisen* virtuoso with a multi-faceted musical career. His professional engagement with Asakusa likewise has many dimensions. He is the owner of Waentei-Kikkō, a traditional Japanese restaurant in the area that doubles as a *Tsugaru-jamisen* performance venue, and where he also teaches private lessons between mealtimes several days each week. Fukui and his family live in the neighborhood as well. His wife, Keiko, works as the manager of Waentei-Kikkō, and, as of 2012, their two children, Yūta and Kanaka, were in middle school and high school respectively. Kanaka also works in the family restaurant on weekends to earn her own spending money. Fukui helps his wife manage the day-to-day operation of Waentei-Kikkō, and performs and explains *Tsugaru-jamisen* for its customers several times during lunch and dinner sessions each day. His professional activities in Asakusa—and to a certain extent his family concerns too—are centered on the functioning of Waentei-Kikkō as a traditional Japanese restaurant and *Tsugaru-jamisen* performance space.

Fukui’s engagement with *Tsugaru-jamisen* began when he was a young man. He was born (1962) and grew up in the Edogawa Ward of Tokyo, where he learned to play the instrument when he was in high school. He studied with Fukui Tendai, the *iemoto* (headmaster) of the Fukui School of *Tsugaru-jamisen*, and had the opportunity to spend a three-year apprenticeship with the *iemoto* following his own high school graduation. In 1987, he was granted *natori* (given a stage name—his is Kōdai—that legitimizes his playing
and teaching) as a member of the Fukui School. In the following year, he graduated from the NHK Japanese Traditional Music School (*NHK Hōgaku Ikuseikai*). Since that time, he has maintained a performance and teaching career, giving several solo and collaborative recitals, performing with Aomori-born *enka* singer Ikuzō Yoshi in the 1990s, forming and regularly performing with Ryūjin, an eclectic ensemble of traditional Japanese instruments, appearing on the high profile stage of the NHK *Kōhaku Uta Gassen* (the Japanese public broadcaster’s annual New Year’s Eve music show), recording the opening theme music for a historical television drama—Fuji TV’s “Kayō Jidai-geiki” (“Tuesday Period Drama”)—and touring internationally.¹¹

Fukui and his wife bought the building that would become Waentei-Kikkō in 2005 specifically with the intent to design a traditional Japanese restaurant where he, his students, and colleagues could perform *Tsugaru-jamisen* for customers. As the owner of Waentei-Kikkō and as a master *Tsugaru-jamisen* player, he works to provide the restaurant’s customers with a satisfying traditional Japanese dining and musical experience.

Waentei-Kikkō is located near the southeast corner of Sensō-ji’s precinct, nestled snugly between a popular festival goods store and a small office building. Its front door opens onto a tiny fenced-in garden facing a narrow alleyway. During the neighborhood’s active daytime hours, this alleyway has a constant flow of pedestrians, from meandering sightseers, to rickshaw runners giving their guided tours, to local shopkeepers running errands. Across the alley is a small playground with jungle gyms, slides, and swings, where children often play. Directly next to the playground is the hill upon which the small temple dedicated to Benzaiten, the goddess of music, sits with its great bronze bell, surrounded by

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towering trees. Just around the corner is Sensō-ji’s often-crowded open plaza. Although barely off the beaten track, Waentei- Kikko nevertheless remains comfortably removed from the crowds; it is not on a main thoroughfare, but its surroundings enjoy a continual hum of activity.

Because of the restaurant’s construction and its proximity to the alleyway, the bustle outside is often audible inside the building. The walls are thin and not heavily insulated, and the front of the restaurant is only a few yards from the chattering passersby and shouting children. The peal of the temple bell also reverberates loudly, although it is only rung in the very early morning hours when Waentei-Kikkō is not yet open for business. In addition, the nature of its construction means that the sound of Fukui’s Tsugaru-jamisen performance filters through its walls, and can be easily heard from the street. Fukui knows that this is the case, and considers it, in part, a convenient mode of publicizing his business since many of the passersby might notice his music and consider coming into the

restaurant. Due to these physical realities and their sonic repercussions, Fukui regards Waentei-Kikkō to be well placed for the purposes of doing good business as a traditional Japanese restaurant and musical venue.

Fukui’s family home is also quite nearby. It is located a mere five-minute walk away from the restaurant in an apartment complex just north of Kototoi Street, directly across from the Sensō-ji Hospital, and not far from the geisha’s kenban. He has lived in the neighborhood for years, and carries out his everyday activities there. He is, therefore, intimately familiar with many of the area’s local residents, and with its shops, restaurants, and diverse other businesses as well. He understands that Sensō-ji is at the center of activity in the neighborhood and he appreciates that he was able to acquire a restaurant that is so nearby. Other Asakusa places that are important to him are the Asakusa Public Hall, the large venue where he has organized and staged Tsugaru-jamisen performances, and Asakusa Oiwake, a bar located a few blocks west of Kokusai Street that features performances of Japanese folk music, including Tsugaru-jamisen. Among the businesses he frequents most in the area are a couple of sentō (public bath facilities) nearby that he visits when he wants to relax.

Fukui walks the streets of the neighborhood on a daily basis, and he is knowledgeable of its diverse buzzing life. His professional concerns are centered on the Tsugaru-jamisen music that he has built his career upon, and he has the opportunity to inflect the soundscape of Asakusa with its sounds through his performances at Waentei-Kikkō. Thus, Fukui’s music-scape also changes with time and focus. During his lunch-hour performance, for instance, this music-scape includes only the sounds of his own music and spoken explanation to his customers. At other times it expands to include a greater array of
sounds from throughout the neighborhood, which give him a sense of emplacement in wider Asakusa. Nevertheless, Fukui’s experience of sound in the neighborhood revolves around Tsugaru-jamisen music, which defines him as a professional artist and local business owner, and which he is proud to share each day with his restaurant guests.

Below I describe a scene from Fukui’s fundamental traditional musikscape in Asakusa, his experience of sound and place during a performance at Waentei-Kikkō. I will then go on to analyze his Asakusa musikscape with reference to his musiking practice, the nature of his agency, his relationships to Asakusa’s cultural tropes, the diverse range of sounds he encounters there, and finally his changeable sense of place that arises from these factors.

**Sonic Scene:**
**Fukui’s Traditional Musikscape in Waentei-Kikkō**

Just before his lunchtime performance begins, Fukui lingers quietly near the kitchen door with his shamisen and bachi (plectrum) in hand. He watches as his teenaged daughter adjusts the suitate (wooden partition) that separates the restaurant’s small stage from the back hallway and kitchen. The shouts of children playing across the alleyway echo faintly through the front of the building, but no one inside gives them any thought. The lunch guests quiet their chatter in anticipation as Kanaka lowers the volume of the stereo playing the dining room’s background music and raises the lighting on the stage.\(^{12}\) Fukui whispers his thanks to the girl, straightens his posture, puts on a welcoming smile, and strides confidently to the stage. Amid eager applause, he steps up from the stone floor onto the glossy wood of the platform. Slipping off his sandals, he bows deeply to the expectant

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\(^{12}\) For more detailed description of the background music typically played at Waentei-Kikkō, see pages 33-34 in Chapter 1.
crowd, and takes a seat on a small stool. He looks around the quaint dining room in satisfaction. It is a rustic space with sunken dining tables, tatami flooring, and simple wooden trimming—exactly the old-fashioned yet polished ambience he had sought out as a restaurant and performance space. The diners’ clapping subsides and Fukui positions the shamisen on his lap, sliding his left hand up the solid neck of the instrument and grasping the bachi sturdily in his right hand.

He raises the plectrum, striking the lowest string several times in regular succession, then the middle string, then the highest. He adjusts the tuning pegs and all three strings vibrate sympathetically in the shamisen’s distinctive buzzing drone. Focusing on the piece with which he has planned to open this set, he cognitively silences the whispers of the lunch guests. He begins playing. It is an animated, pulsing tune that demonstrates the range of virtuosic techniques, diverse timbres, characteristic gestures, and improvisatory patterns common to Tsugaru-jamisen solo playing. A dynamic performer, Fukui’s face is drawn in concentration. He moves his body as the melody lilts in repetition or coquettish syncopation, and nods his head when his rapid ornamentation falls into a satisfying rolling octuplet. The crowd sits in a rapt silence, respecting customary concert behavior, and genuinely awestruck by Fukui’s virtuosity. His unamplified music fills the intimate space of the small restaurant. Outside, passersby turn their heads as the unexpected shamisen music filters through the thin walls and drifts out into the city street.

Fukui relaxes the tempo at the last moment before the final gesture and closes the piece with a final robust stroke across all three strings. The affable smile returns immediately to his face in response to the appreciative applause from the small crowd. “Arigatō gozaimasu,” he bows spiritedly toward the audience. Turning toward a group of
Caucasian foreigners at a corner table he intones a little awkwardly but very warmly, “Thank you very much.”

With the body of his instrument tucked comfortably under one arm, Fukui apologizes briefly to the non-Japanese spectators for his lack of English skills, and proceeds to explain, in Japanese, the concept of his restaurant—as an old-fashioned building designed for traditional music performance—and the defining characteristics of Tsugaru-jamisen music. He is an engaging speaker with a charming demeanor, and even the audience members who cannot understand his language listen and watch attentively. He speaks humbly and cordially, demonstrating the distinctive sounds of the Tsugaru-jamisen genre in comparison to shamisen styles from other parts of Japan. Engrossed, neither he nor the diners give any notice to the happy shouts of the children that filter through the front of the building from the park across the alley. He concludes his short educational demonstration with the same beaming smile. Preparing to play again, however, he draws his face quickly in concentration. The audience falls silent again as Fukui intuitively places his fingers in position on the neck of his instrument, and once again strikes the string and instrument body powerfully with his bachi.

Analysis

This performance constitutes one of the most focused scenes from Fukui’s musikscape. He, like most contemporary Japanese people, considers Tsugaru-jamisen to be a genre of hōgaku (traditional Japanese music) because it is performed on an instrument that has been played in Japan for centuries and because its stylistic aesthetics developed prior to and independent of “modern” Western musical influence. Since Tsugaru-jamisen is a priority in Fukui’s professional life, he created his own venue in which to perform it and
earn a living. He regards Asakusa to be an appropriate neighborhood for this purpose, and he lives and works there explicitly for those musical/professional reasons.

Fukui considers the traditional music of the geisha to be a defining sonic quality of Asakusa, but his comments also indicate that he is knowledgeable about the diversity of Asakusa outside of its traditional Japanese elements. For instance, he is aware of many of the other entertainment practices that take place in the neighborhood, and he understands the centrality of Sensō-ji, the importance of tourism, and the neighborhood’s cultural distinctiveness as a part of Shitamachi. He understands *Tsugaru-jamisen* to be a traditional and folk musical practice with origins in the nineteenth century, and continuing associations with Aomori Prefecture in northeastern Japan where it developed, and so he sees his performance of that music in Asakusa to be something of a transplant. Even so, *Tsugaru-jamisen* has become a nation-wide (and, to a certain extent, an international) phenomenon; and so, despite its rural roots, Fukui considers it fitting to play that music in Asakusa since it resonates with broader notions of traditional Japan in the general Japanese consciousness. In this regard, Fukui creates traditional Japanese sounds by expertly performing his music for customers each day in Waentei-Kikkō.

1. **The sound of *Tsugaru-jamisen***

*Tsugaru-jamisen* anchors Fukui’s traditional musikscape in Asakusa. It is a very distinctive genre, with sounds and techniques that distinguish it sharply from other *shamisen* styles. Fukui is keenly aware of these differences, and they are essential to his music making and to his identity as a master player. The average Japanese person, on the other hand, has relatively little knowledge about *Tsugaru-jamisen*, or indeed any other traditional music style. For this reason, Fukui is sure to explain the sound and playing
techniques of Tsugaru-jamisen to his customers at Waentei-Kikkō each mealtime. During one typical lunch hour, like the one described in Fukui’s musikscape sonic scene above, he explained that Tsugaru-jamisen is characterized by “a feeling of intensity/potency” (hakuryoku no aru kanji, see Video 7, 2:43-2:56). To show that intensity, he demonstrated one of the instrument’s idiomatic plectrum techniques, striking its strings with his bachi so that the plectrum also hits the skin of the instrument body, creating a sharp percussive sound (see Video 7, 4:26-5:08). He described this technique and its sound as specifically tied to the place of the genre’s origin: the bachi strikes forcefully “as if to beat back the severe, harsh wind and snow of Tsugaru” (kibishii fūsetsu, Tsugaru no kaze ya yuki ni makenai yō ni). In other words, he aesthetically connected the natural environment of the place where the genre first developed with the actual musical sounds. In further explanation, he also demonstrated one melodic ornament that is idiomatic of Tsugaru-jamisen. There are a number of such ornamentations, called korobashi or kamashi, which are produced by combining left-hand pizzicati with quick strokes of the bachi to create groups of three or more notes.¹³ On this afternoon, Fukui illustrated example (a) notated in Example 3, below (see Video 7, 4:40-5:00).

In continuing to explain the genre to his mealtime guests, Fukui highlighted three distinctive features of Tsugaru-jamisen—the manner of holding the instrument, the plucking technique and the music’s resulting intensity, and the basic pitch content of its melodies (scales)—by juxtaposing it with two contrasting shamisen styles. He first

¹³ Gerald Groemer, The Spirit of Tsugaru: Blind Musicians, Tsugaru-Jamisen, and the Folk Music of Northern Japan, ed. J. Bunker Clark, Detroit Studies in Musicology/Studies in Music 24 (Warren, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 1999), 104. Groemer also explains that, in playing these ornamentations, pitches of a slightly different timbre also are created when the fingers of the left hand stop strings by hammering them onto the fingerboard. He gives five examples of korobashi, pointing to their use in actual transcribed Tsugaru-jamisen pieces performed by the master player Takahashi Chikuzan.
Western notation symbols
- □ = downstroke of the *bachi*
- ▼ = upstroke of the *bachi*
- ◯ = left-hand pizzicato
- ♪ = pitch produced by a finger hammering a string onto the fingerboard;
  the G4s in example (a) are notated in parentheses because the pitch is practically
  indiscernible when played at tempo.
- 3, 1 = number of the left-hand finger plucking the string (stopped or unstopped);
  when the third finger plucks, the string is usually stopped with the first finger;
  a pizzicato with the first finger sounds an open string.

Japanese notation symbols
- ★ = upstroke of the *bachi*. The absence of an articulation symbol indicates a downstroke.
- ▼ = left-hand pizzicato
- III, I = number of the left-hand finger stopping the string when it is plucked;
  when the first finger is stopping the string, the third finger plucks the pizzicato;
  finger numbers are not indicated when they would be obvious to the player
  knowledgeable of hand-position and fingering conventions.
- 0, 3, 4 = finger position on the neck of the instrument; 0 indicates an open string.

Example 3. Examples of Tsugaru-jamisen ornamentation. The left-hand examples are
in Western notation, and represent the musical sounds produced. They are modeled
on the transcriptions of Tsugaru-jamisen by Gerald Groemer (1999). The right-hand
examples are the tablature of the same ornaments as published by Fukui in his
method book (2004). The discrepancies in rhythm are due to the fact that the
tablature prioritizes finger and plectrum movements and positions over the
representation of sounds produced.
described *Tsugaru-jamisen* as distinct from the *shamisen* genres played by geisha. He demonstrated the musical differences by pointing to the instrument’s position in relation to the players’ body (in *Tsugaru-jamisen*, the instrument is held against one’s torso while playing, with the neck pointing higher, see Image 104), the *bachi* plucking technique (forceful and percussive in *Tsugaru-jamisen*), and the resulting difference in sound quality:

The geisha’s music is a little bit different. [The *shamisen* is held] a little bit away from the [player’s] body (Image 105), and [it is played more] softly and gently. If you go to Kyoto, the song called “Gion Kouta” is one such tune with that gentle feeling. The way the sound is produced also becomes quite gentle (he plays the opening phrase of “Gion Kouta” on his instrument). That is Kyoto music (Video 7, 2:57-3:47).

He went on to contrast *Tsugaru-jamisen* with the style of folk music played on a very similar three-stringed lute, the *sanshin* of Okinawa (the predecessor of the *shamisen*). In doing so, he pointed to the idiomatic pitch set used in Okinawan folk music, as well as the style’s distinctively jaunty triple meter:
If you go down south, there is Okinawa Prefecture. Okinawan songs are a bit different too. There is the usual "do re mi" scale, right? (He plays a D-major scale on his instrument, ascending and descending.) In Okinawa Prefecture, re and la are dropped, and if we do that (he plays the ryūkyū scale, ascending and descending, while singing along the solfege), do, mi, fa, so, si, do, do, si, so, fa, mi, do. That has a particularly Okinawan feeling. And if you add the rhythm to it (he plays a lilting, Okinawan folk melody on his instrument), it’s like this. It kind of makes you want to dance (Video 7, 3:48-4:25).

Although Fukui did not explicitly demonstrate the difference between the ryūkyū scale (Example 4b) and the min-yō (folk song) scale most typically used in Tsugaru-jamisen (Example 4a), he took for granted that his audience would find the sound of the major third heard in the ryūkyū scale strikingly different since it was completely absent from the Tsugaru-jamisen piece he had played earlier in the set.¹⁴ There are numerous other distinctive musical sounds and performance techniques of Tsugaru-jamisen that Fukui did not demonstrate, including, for example, particular rhythmic characteristics, the use of vibrato, sliding between pitches, approaches to improvisation, and the use of kakegoe (non-lexical syllables) by instrumentalists (see Groemer 1999). Fukui presented the three

![Example 4](attachment://example4.png)

Example 4. The min-yō scale prevalent in Tsugaru-jamisen, and the ryūkyū scale used in Okinawan sanshin music, distinguished by the intervals between the lower tonal center and the intermediate tone of each tetrachord.

discussed here because he considers them central to the genre’s uniqueness and because they are easily explained and demonstrated to his non-expert audiences.\(^\text{15}\)

While it is important in Fukui’s mind to distinguish *Tsugaru-jamisen* from other styles of *shamisen* music, he also describes *Tsugaru-jamisen* as a type of *hōgaku* (traditional Japanese music), a term which places it in the same larger musical category as those other *shamisen* styles. The term *hōgaku* is most typically used to refer to musical instruments and practices considered to be native to Japan, and originating in the time prior to significant Western/global influence there.\(^\text{16}\) By referring to *Tsugaru-jamisen* as *hōgaku*, Fukui emphasizes the genre’s perceived “Japaneseness,” while also attaching it to the “aura of venerability” and nostalgia that notions of “traditionalism” connote.\(^\text{17}\) Calling *Tsugaru-jamisen* “*hōgaku*” is significant, therefore, because it places the genre in the broader cultural category of traditional Japanese (*nihon no dentōteki na*) objects and practices, aligning it with Asakusa’s trope of tradition.

### ii. Fukui’s traditional musikscape

Referring to *Tsugaru-jamisen* as *hōgaku* also brings together thematically the music performed in Waentei-Kikkō and the motif of tradition that is central to Fukui’s design of that performance space. Since age and Japanese origins are central to this notion of

\(^{\text{15}}\) For an extensive discussion of *Tsugaru-jamisen* and its development as a style, see Chapter 4 of Groemer, *The Spirit of Tsugaru: Blind Musicians, Tsugaru-Jamisen, and the Folk Music of Northern Japan*, 73–184.

\(^{\text{16}}\) The word *hōgaku* is often used to distinguish the numerous music traditions present in Japan prior to the Meiji Restoration from the Western musical practices and aesthetics (*yōgaku*) that have had hegemonic force in Japan from the mid-nineteenth century onward. The Chinese characters used to spell *hōgaku* literally mean “Japanese music,” whereas those used to spell *yōgaku* mean “Western music.” In truth, it is generally recognized that *hōgaku* traditions that remain in practice today can all be traced to mainland Asian musical practices that were borrowed from China (sometimes via Korea) beginning in the sixth and seventh centuries C.E. There is also a Japanese term that refers to “Eastern music” (*tōgaku*) as an alternative antonym for *yōgaku*, which places Japanese music in that larger category of Asian music as a whole. *Hōgaku* remains a meaningful category, however, in denoting the practices and aesthetics of music in Japan that have developed for centuries on the Japanese islands, largely independently of the mainland traditions from which they were originally derived.

tradition, Fukui considers the physical construction of the restaurant building to be well suited to the traditional quality he values in the music that he plays there:

This building was constructed from materials brought here from Gifu Prefecture. This wood is one hundred years old. It is from the main part of an old watermill, partly made from the water wheel. I had a concept for a restaurant where customers could come to hear hōgaku. That is what I was thinking, seven years ago when I purchased this building.

He has also named the restaurant to reflect these priorities. The meaning of the Chinese character used to spell the “wa” (和) in Waentei is “Japan/Japanese,” and (like the “hō” [邦] of hōgaku) is typically used to convey notions of “traditional Japanese.” “En” is spelled in hiragana (えん); but, as stated in promotional materials for the restaurant, the syllable is meant to encompass the meaning of three Chinese characters all pronounced “en”: 宴 (banquet), 演 (performance), and 縁 (human relationships).18 “Tei” (亭) in Waentei is a Chinese character commonly used to denote restaurant names. The word Kikkō is spelled with two Chinese characters (幸吉) which have the complementary meanings of “joy” and “happiness.” The second of those characters was also consciously borrowed from Fukui’s afore-mentioned stage forename (Kōdai, 幸大) granted him by Fukui-iemoto.19 The name of the restaurant (和えん亭 吉幸), therefore, implicitly and explicitly encompasses all of the meanings that Fukui strives to cultivate in Waentei-Kikkō’s sense of place: notions of

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18 The restaurant’s website explains that Waentei-Kikkō is a place to share seasonal cuisine while listening to traditional Japanese instruments and making connections with one another. (和/Kikkō no kisetsu no o-ryōri; 演/hōgaki wo kokinagara…; 縁/okyaku-sama hitori-hitori to…) [http://www.waentei-kikko.com/).
19 In assigning natori names, the newly denominated player takes the surname of the relevant shamisen school (in this case, Fukui), and the iemoto gives a forename that includes one Chinese character of his or her own stage forename (in this case, 大 [dai], from iemoto Fukui Tendai [福居天大]), and one new character that is unique to this player. The character, 幸, which Fukui used in naming his restaurant, is, therefore, the only character of his Tsugaru-jamisen stage name that is personal to him.
traditional Japaneseness, communal eating, musical performance and participation, and his own Tsugaru-jamisen identity.

In Fukui’s mind, the physical design elements of the restaurant’s structure are essential, to the ambience and character of the space as a restaurant and a performance venue. The vestige pieces of old wood in particular exemplify its traditional essence, making it an appropriate venue to stage the hōgaku that he has spent his life working to master. Certainly its size is also an important factor. It is a small eating establishment, with enough tables to seat fewer than thirty customers in the main dining room, and Fukui frequently points out that the sound of the Tsugaru-jamisen can easily be heard throughout the room without the aid of a microphone. Preparations of fish and vegetables are served according to the season, and hot green tea is continually flowing. Customers remove their shoes and shuffle to sit down upon cushions on the raised tatami flooring. Cultivating a fitting backdrop for the music that is performed there, every major aspect of the Waentei-Kikkō experience is tailored to feel traditional.

Outside mealtimes, Fukui’s musiking of Asakusa is not so focused. At its most expansive, his experience of sonic Asakusa is quite diverse. He is a local resident, who has had adequate free time to become familiar with the various places and activities in the neighborhood. For instance, he and his family say prayers at Sensō-ji and Asakusa Shrine on special occasions. He eats at local restaurants, shops in nearby stores and markets, relaxes in nearby public baths, occasionally attends musical performances in the area, and he is on friendly terms with many of his neighbors. His business also benefits from the tourism economy: as a restaurateur, he interacts with sightseers to the area from
near and far. He hears Asakusa’s clergy, shopkeepers, performers, sightseers, and residents, and they all contribute to his multifarious understanding of the neighborhood.

His choice to live and work in Asakusa, however, revolves around his identity as a performer of traditional Japanese music. Asakusa is a neighborhood partially defined by its traditional activities and sounds, and his hōgaku Tsugaru-jamisen music performance is not out of place there. He explained, however, that he did not specifically intend to come to Asakusa when he set out to create a traditional Japanese restaurant for his music.

[I am here] because this building already existed here. I happened upon it quite accidentally. This building is fantastic, isn’t it? So because of this building, I am in Asakusa. I wanted to have a restaurant where people could come hear shamisen. I looked around in Ginza, Kagurazaka, and other places for a setting that suited the sound of the shamisen. I looked around for quite some time, but then this building came up for sale. It was an old building with a lot of charm, and I thought [Asakusa] would be the perfect town (machī) to have such a restaurant. That is why I am here—because of this beautiful wooden building. This kind of atmosphere was very important to me.

With its low eaves, plaster walls, and exposed-wood detailing, this old-fashioned building is the physical presence of traditional Japan for Fukui. The trope of tradition in the neighborhood no doubt also played a role in its earlier owners’ decisions to build and maintain a structure with such antiquated and rustic design elements. Even though Fukui did not initially seek out a venue in Asakusa, those qualities in the building correspond with the traditional nature that he perceives in his music, and inspired him to create his restaurant there.

Significantly, the old-fashioned appearance and ambience that Fukui values in the restaurant’s structure also enable soundscape overlap between its traditional Japanese interior and the heterogeneous urban exterior. Despite the fact that he performs his music without amplification, it can easily be heard from the outside. There is no motor traffic in
the narrow alleyway, and the sound filters clearly through the thin walls to be heard by passing pedestrians.

[We don’t notice or pay attention to sounds from outside here inside of Waentei-Kikkō.] But actually isn’t it the opposite, that when there is a lesson right here [at the front of the restaurant], the sound of this space is audible outside? That is a very Asakusa-like atmosphere (Asakusa-rashii fun-iki), where Japanese traditional music (Nihon no hōgaku) can be heard.

Fukui explained that, although outside sounds are clearly audible inside the restaurant—in fact, we could hear children playing at the park as we were having this conversation at its front-most table—those sounds are of no consequence to him, the other staff, or their customers. During mealtimes, the restaurant is a place defined by traditional Japanese dining and music, and so when he is performing for and conversing with his customers, Fukui quiets the outside sounds from his consciousness, constructing a musikscape that is confined only to the sounds that contribute to the meaningful sense of place in which he is participating.

In discussing the flow of sound into and out of his building, he emphasized that the sound of his music has an impact on the greater sense of place in the neighborhood, stating that the sound of his hōgaku creates a particularly Asakusa-like ambience. The uninsulated walls of Waentei-Kikkō allow for soundscape overlap between inside and outside, but for Fukui, that overlap is only noticed and meaningful in one direction (see Figure 5). In reality, there is not an unusually high occurrence of indoor musical sounds filtering to the outside in Asakusa, nor are such occurrences more likely to be of hōgaku in Asakusa than in other neighborhoods.20 Fukui was not, therefore, describing a real physical difference between

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20 Jazz and other music is often audible from inside bars in Asakusa, for instance, and I have, from the street, heard people practicing and performing traditional Japanese instruments in many other parts of Tokyo as well.
Asakusa’s audible soundscape and those of other Tokyo neighborhoods, but instead was implying that he perceives traditional Japanese qualities in the character of Asakusa as a whole. He considers the non-amplified *Tsugaru-jamisen* music drifting out through the thin walls of his rustic older building to be a sonic contribution to that traditional Japanese character.

Despite his remarks that his music is well suited to the neighborhood, he also understands *Tsugaru-jamisen* to be very explicitly “not the music of Asakusa (*Asakusa no ongaku de wa nai*).” He knows that Asakusa is a heterogeneously defined neighborhood, and that, to a certain extent, his *hōgaku* is appropriately played there. But he also understands that, with his music, he imbues his corner of Asakusa with a particularly Tsugaru sense of place. Indeed, the name of his *shamisen* genre directly references the

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**Figure 5.** A comparison of the physically real sonic environment in Asakusa (left) and Fukui’s perception of it (right). In physical reality (left), the two soundscapes overlap equally. The sounds from outside the building (represented in orange) are audible inside of Waentei-Kikkō, and the sounds from inside the restaurant (transparent blue) radiate out into the outside environment. However, Fukui constructs his musikscape (right) in such a way that the penetration of the outside soundscape into the building is suppressed and the inside environment is defined exclusively by its own sounds (solid blue), but those inside sounds do radiate out from the building to the outside, overlapping with the external soundscape there.
region of Tsugaru in northern Japan where it originated, and therefore it continues to have strong associations with that part of the country.\(^{21}\)

Place origins and associations are an important element through which Fukui explains *Tsugaru-jamisen* to his mealtime customers, and he describes this style in relation to other styles that developed in different geographical locations. For instance, he placed the style of geisha in the city of Kyoto.\(^{22}\) He chose to demonstrate the soft and gentle qualities of geisha’s “Kyoto” style—in contrast to *Tsugaru-jamisen’s* forceful intensity—by playing “Gion Kouta (Little Song of Gion),” a piece whose name directly refers to the largest and most famous *hanamachi* (geisha district) of that city.\(^{23}\) It is noteworthy that Fukui chose to contrast *Tsugaru-jamisen* with the music of the geisha of Kyoto rather than those of Asakusa. I believe that this has less to do with any musical differences between the *shamisen* styles played in Tokyo and Kyoto—which exist, but are not particularly significant in comparison to their differences with *Tsugaru-jamisen*—and more to do with

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\(^{21}\) Henry Johnson discusses the role of *Tsugaru-jamisen* in discourses on regional ownership, and of regional and national constructions of cultural identity [Henry Johnson, “Tsugaru Shamisen: From Region to Nation (and Beyond) and Back Again,” *Asian Music* 37, no. 1 (Winter-Spring 2006): 75–100]. Indeed, various products and cultural practices are celebrated for their supposed regional origins throughout Japan, while at the same time occupying the larger category of “traditional Japanese,” complicating notions of cultural ownership, and regional and national identity.

\(^{22}\) Although in actuality, geisha play a variety of shamisen styles, Fukui generalized some of the significant differences between the aesthetics of *Tsugaru-jamisen* and the *ozashiki* and theater music typically played by geisha, namely volume and overall intensity. Geisha throughout Japan play many styles of *shamisen*, which differ depending on genre (*nagauta* versus *kouta*, for instance), location (Kyoto styles differ from Tokyo styles), and *iemoto* (for instance, there are musical differences between the Kasuga and Tamura *kouta* schools, both of Tokyo).

\(^{23}\) *Kouta* (literally “little song”) are a genre of short songs, accompanied by *shamisen*, with their roots in the late Edo period. *Kouta* enjoyed a significant popularity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. “Gion Kouta” became a nationwide hit in 1930. It was first performed as the theme song for the silent film trilogy “Gion Kouta E-higasa (Gion Kouta Decorated Parasol),” in which an actress, dressed as a geisha, sang the song live onstage at cinemas. Since that time, it became so popular that it was soon incorporated into real geisha’s repertoire in Gion and has served as a kind of theme song for that district until today. Ironically, the song’s composer, Sassa Kōka (1886-1961), had previously been active as a composer in the Asakusa Opera (Kyoto Prefecture, "Eiga 'Gion kouta e-higasa tanuki daijin' no gazō haishin," *Kyōto-fu*, accessed January 26, 2015, http://www.pref.kyoto.jp/bungei/eizou-gionkouta.html).
the fact that the Kyoto geisha are by far the best known among non-musicians in Japan and elsewhere.

Fukui proceeded to contrast *Tsugaru-jamisen* with the folk music of another geographical region, Okinawa. Okinawan folk music is, outside of the music of the indigenous Ainu, arguably the Japanese folk style that most strongly contrasts that of Tsugaru. Fukui illustrated some of that dissimilarity by demonstrating the *ryūkyū* musical scale, a major pentatonic scale that is absent among Japanese musical traditions outside of Okinawa. He described it as having an “Okinawan feeling,” as many Japanese people familiar with Okinawa’s folk music would be able to recognize and associate its unusual scale with that musical genre and geographical area. Fukui demonstrated the scale in the context of a tune, playing a lilting folk melody from that southern-most region of the country.

Finally, in contrast to the Kyoto and Okinawa *shamisen/sanshin* styles, Fukui placed *Tsugaru-jamisen* in its home in northeastern Japan. In doing so, he not only stated that the region of Tsugaru is the source of the musical practice, but also suggested that the intensity of the music itself is born out of the harsh winters through which the people of Tsugaru must struggle. He demonstrated that intensity by forcefully striking the strings and body with his *bachi*, and illustrated one of the iconic ornamental techniques that distinguish *Tsugaru-jamisen* from other *shamisen* styles. He continued on to perform several more virtuosic and energetic *Tsugaru-jamisen* pieces that incorporate those musical features for the group of lunch customers, providing them with the standard—traditional Japanese yet Tsugaru—musical experience at Waentei-Kikkō. By performing and placing *Tsugaru-

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jamisen in this way for his Asakusa customers, Fukui earns a livelihood in his home city while simultaneously complicating the trope of tradition in the neighborhood and bringing in location-specific musical meanings that are far removed from the urban environment of Asakusa.

Because of his unique social positioning as a Tsugaru-jamisen virtuoso and Tokyo native, Fukui has interpreted and played a role in Asakusa’s soundscape montage in new ways. By establishing his Tsugaru-jamisen restaurant in Asakusa, Fukui is contributing to Asakusa’s existing traditional soundscape, but he is also overlapping that previously extrinsic Tsugaru music with Asakusa’s urban sonic environment. This overlap not only alters Asakusa’s soundscape, but it also enables new musical collaborations between Fukui and other Asakusa musicians. For instance, he has worked with the geisha, Seiko, a relationship that was made possible through his proximity to the Asakusa hanamachi.25

Furthermore, Waentei-Kikkō has been featured in Asakusa magazine, and it is described in the globally distributed English-language travel guidebook Frommer’s Tokyo as the best dining experience with traditional music in the city.26 With such a reputation, the restaurant and its music are attracting people to Asakusa who might otherwise not choose to come there, while inspiring others to carry its Tsugaru-jamisen music far beyond its place of origin.27 In evidence of this, Fukui proudly tells his guests about famous patrons to Waentei-Kikkō. He displays a picture of Katherine Jackson, the mother of American pop

26 Beth Reiber, Frommer’s Tokyo (John Wiley & Sons, 2012).
27 Anecdotally, I invited a friend—a rather conservative elderly woman from Tokyo’s Shinagawa Ward—to have lunch with me at Waentei-Kikkō one afternoon. She was delighted and impressed by the restaurant’s food and Fukui’s performance, and she reported to me later that she returned to the restaurant a few months later with some of her other friends to eat and hear Tsugaru-jamisen live. She claimed that before my
invitation, she rarely came to Asakusa, but Waentei-Kikkō gave her a cause to visit more frequently. I cannot imagine that she is unique in this regard.
star Michael Jackson, sitting next to him at his restaurant’s front bar (Image 106). He is also delighted to share that after the Japanese astronaut, Yamazaki Naoko, heard his music at Waentei-Kikkō, she took a copy of his CD on her next mission to space.28

Through the nexus of *Tsugaru-jamisen* in the traditional Japanese setting of Waentei-Kikkō, Fukui is altering Asakusa’s soundscape and beginning to redefine which traditional styles can be called “Asakusa music.” He is also expanding the breadth of his own traditional musicscape by participating in new soundscape overlappings that would not be otherwise possible, be they within Asakusa, as *Tsugaru-jamisen* intersects with a geisha and the mother of the King of Pop, or beyond, with literally cosmic range.

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28 The recording is entitled *Ryūjin*, eponymous of the Japanese traditional music team he is a part of with Katouno Mamoru on *shakuhachi*, Sugawara Mitsuaki on *taiko*, and Maruta Miki on *koto*. The group occasionally performs with him at Waentei-Kikkō, and was also a part of Fukui’s large-scale performance in Asakusa Public Hall in 2012.
Chapter 6

Late-Modern *Roman* and Shitamachi

“There’s really tasty food here, but there are also stores that sell kind of strange things. There are stores that have really good cheap stuff, and other stores that really rip you off. I had like two beers once and was charged $70. There are horse-race gamblers that drink alcohol and sleep [on the streets] looking like they are homeless, but also there are rich Shitamachi kids wearing nice polo shirts.”

- Oshow

Interlude

On the sidewalk on the south edge of Sensō-ji’s precinct, the tinny old recording of a big band, punctuated by the crackles and pops, issues from behind a curtain. “*Tōkyō bugiugi, rizumu ukiuki, kokoro zukizuki wakuwaku* (Tokyo boogie woogie, a lighthearted rhythm, hearts throb and tremble),” sings Kasagi Shidzuko. Her 1947 jazz tune “Tokyo Boogie Woogie” plays constantly during business hours from a small stereo outside of the noodle shop Kagetsu-dō. Although a part of the restaurant’s marketing strategy, for Fukui, it is so commonplace that he almost never takes any notice of it—he hears it every day, sometimes multiple times, as he passes by Kagetsu-dō when going to and from Waentei-Kikkō. For a young boy waiting in line to purchase an ice cream cone at the noodle shop, the song sounds old fashioned but cheery, and he bounces his body in rhythm with its beat as he happily anticipates his cold treat. For Ōno Megumi, a jazz singer who is strolling through the temple precinct before her gig at a local bar, the song is familiar and nostalgic, and
reminds her of the hours she spent listening to such classic songs when she was a young aspiring singer. Struck by a feeling of sentimentality, she promises herself that she will come back to eat at this noodle shop on a free evening someday soon.

I. Late-Modern Roman Musiking in Asakusa

Ōno Megumi is a Tokyo resident whose musikscape in Asakusa is defined by the trope of late-modern roman. Ōno describes herself as a jazz singer, and as of 2012, she had been performing music throughout Tokyo and the surrounding area for about twelve years. She was born and raised in the Nerima Ward on the western side of Tokyo in the 1970s, and she continues to live in the Yamanote area of the city. She was first attracted to jazz music as a young child when she watched the Hollywood film The Glenn Miller Story (1954) on television. A musician from the age of six, she first started studying classical piano privately. She diversified her musical skill set in junior high school by playing the tenor saxophone in her school’s concert band, as well as singing vocals and playing keyboards in a rock band formed among her friends. She was recruited by a special music high school,
but because of personal family circumstances, she was unable to enroll there. Her interest in music did not fade, however. In her late teen years, while browsing in a record store, she came upon an album of legendary American jazz singer, Billie Holiday, and was greatly inspired by the sounds she heard. It was from that experience that she began to seriously develop an ambition to become a jazz singer herself.

A few years later, Ōno enrolled in the Yokohama Jazz School to study jazz vocals for one year. Thereafter, she continued her studies with a local private teacher for two more years, and then began studying music and practicing on her own. Since 2000, she has been performing jazz, while continuing to receive some voice training from a senior jazz vocalist in the city. She has a modest fan following (for instance, she has 64 followers on Facebook as of May 2015) and sings at relatively small venues. Because Ōno averages one to two such performances per week, she is unable to financially support herself entirely as a performer. Instead, a significant part of her income comes from teaching vocal and piano lessons, as well as working as a music copyist. Her career, therefore, comprises various music-related activities, but performing as a jazz singer is an essential part of how she defines herself. Over the course of her musical education and performance career, she has developed a repertoire that mainly comes from the Great American Songbook, and a performing style that draws on the tradition of American musicians of that repertoire in the mid-twentieth century.¹

¹ I use the term “Great American Songbook” as it is defined by The Great American Songbook Foundation, to refer to American collection of popular music from Broadway and Hollywood musicals prevalent from the 1920s to 1960s (http://www.thecenterfortheperformingarts.org/Great-American-Songbook-Initiative.aspx). In addition to this repertoire, Ōno explained that she sings jazz-related genres popular in those decades, including bebop and bossa nova.
Ōno began performing in the Asakusa area around 2007, singing at a live house (raibu hausu, live music venue) called Balloon, located on Kokusai Street south near Tawaramachi Station. She has held her current engagement at another Asakusa venue, the Live-Bar Ship’s Wheel - Darling (Laibu Bā Darin – Dārin, hereafter, Darling), since 2009. She is typically scheduled to perform there only twice per month, and so she has regular gigs in other parts of the city and surrounding prefectures, including frequent appearances in Shinjuku’s Kabuki-chō district, periodic ones in Yokohama, and occasional performances at various other venues and events. Besides her engagements at Darling, she normally does not spend any time in Asakusa, and carries out the majority of her everyday activities in other parts of Tokyo nearer her home. Her lived interaction with Asakusa is, therefore, defined almost entirely by her activities as a jazz singer.

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2 The live bar’s name contains wordplay. The Japanese word darin means “ship’s wheel,” while elongating the “a” sound in the word (dālin) produces the Japanese transliteration of the English “darling.” According to the live-bar’s homepage, the original intent was to name the venue “Ship’s Wheel” (Darin) and design the interior to resemble a cabin in a luxury ocean liner. The English subtitle “Darling” was added when the co-owner and bartender, a Romanian woman, consistently mispronounced the Japanese name.
Darling is located on the main thoroughfare of Umamichi Street, a few blocks north and across the street from Asakusa Station, and near the intersection of Denbō-in Street (see Map 9). It occupies the second floor of a small, modern, multi-story building, nondescript in its white tile façade and unadorned blue awning. A greengrocer and a tobacconist occupy the first floor of the building, while apartment units constitute the seven floors above it. It is a modestly sized venue; there is a small stage at the back of its
one main room, just big enough for a spinet piano, a drum set, and room for one or two other musicians such as a vocalist or guitarist. Near the stage are six tables where patrons can sit to enjoy some food and drinks, and there are a few seats at the bar at the front of the room near the stairs from the street.

Image 110. The location of Live-Bar Darling. The venue occupies the second floor of the tall white building pictured here. The thoroughfare onto which the building opens is Umamichi Street. Denbō-in Street is on the left (image generated by Google).

Image 111. The small stage at Darling (http://www.tokyo-asakusa.com/).
Darling is open most nights each week, from 7:30 p.m. until 12:30 a.m., and each night it is open, a musical act appears on its stage from 8:00 p.m. until 11:00 p.m. The description on the venue’s homepage explains that it is equally defined by music and drink, and that it has an atmosphere of a lively jazz bar. The homepage also makes clear, however, that Darling’s live performances are not limited to standard jazz, and include a range of genres including oldies (ōrudīzu, defined in Japan as British and American popular music of the 1950s and 60s), bossa nova, Latin music, Hawai’ian music, and samba, in an effort to appeal to a broad range of audiences. The live bar is not physically designed in relation to any particular musical style, and instead is named and decorated according to a general nautical theme.

In keeping with their web advertising, the acts that Darling’s owners schedule span a variety of genres in a given month, and they are, by necessity, small ensembles, which typically accompany a solo vocalist. Ōno, for instance, often performs there accompanied by a band of piano, string bass, and drums. Although the venue is small, vocalists like Ōno almost always use a microphone to be heard over the powerful sound of their band. Due to the nature of the typical instrumentation and amplified voice, the sound created in the live bar can be quite substantial. In awareness of this fact, the owners of Darling have installed a soundproof door at the top of the steps from the street, and it is kept closed to minimize any disturbance to their neighbors. The door also prevents most outside sounds from intruding into the live bar. The space inside of Darling is visually cut off from the outside, as there are no windows in the bar and stage area. Due to these physical realities and their sonic and visual repercussions, Ōno is able to regard Darling as strongly defined by the

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music performed there, and as a *place* that is distinct and separate from its surrounding environment.

Ôno tends to mainly think of Asakusa as a neighborhood where the past remains intact, and where earlier styles of jazz like the ones that she sings remain relevant. Not only does she feel that her Asakusa audiences appreciate her mid-twentieth-century jazz more than audiences in other parts of the city, she is also keenly aware of various venues in the area that specialize in similar decades-old music, and she considers the neighborhood as a whole to be one where such older (i.e. late-modern) jazz styles are valued and regularly performed. Furthermore, because Darling is located on the same main thoroughfare as Asakusa Station, through which Ôno travels to and from the neighborhood, she usually traverses the distance between the train terminal and the live house without interacting significantly with other places and activities in the neighborhood. In other words, although she has visited Sensō-ji and Asakusa’s other popular sights, in recent years when she comes to Asakusa, it is to sing at Darling. She typically chooses not to interact with the neighborhood’s various other tropes, and instead tends to participate exclusively in her late-modern *roman* musical activities at the live bar.

Below I describe a scene from Ôno’s fundamental late-modern *roman* musikscape in Asakusa, her experience of sound and place during a performance at Darling. I will then go on to analyze her Asakusa musikscape with reference to her musiking practice, the nature of her agency, her relationships to Asakusa’s cultural tropes, the diverse range of sounds she encounters there, and finally her changeable sense of place that arises from these factors.
**Sonic Scene:**  
**Ôno’s Late-Modern Roman Musikscape in Darling**

Ôno stands on stage, her eyes closed and her microphone held loosely in front of her body. The piano, bass, and drums begin the opening of the jazz standard, “Someone to Watch Over Me” (1926). Under the warm stage lights, she opens her eyes to the otherwise dimly lit room and, as the piano reaches the introduction’s anacrusis, she takes a breath and brings the microphone to her mouth: “There’s a saying old says that love is blind, still we’re often told, ‘seek and ye shall find...’” She sings with a dark and nuanced tone, and—although she does not understand the text perfectly, sometimes struggling to pronounce the English words that are alien to her mouth—she is confident in her ability to convey emotion in the music (see Video 8). Her soft and smoky voice renders the melody with ease, and she looks dreamily out into the audience while instinctively coordinating her vocal line with the band’s accompaniment. She reaches the final line, pausing emotively before crooning the last word. “Oh, how I need someone to watch over......me...”

As the piano tinkles its final arpeggiated notes and Ôno’s smooth vibrato fades, the small crowd seated at the low dark tables clap in quiet appreciation. The singer bows with a smile and thanks the audience, her speaking voice high and light in comparison to the melody she has just sung. Ice clinks in glasses and the audience murmurs in conversation with one another. Ôno scans the room with her friendly smile, joking a little nervously with the crowd to keep them amused between musical numbers. The expectation of this light comedy is her least favorite part of performing in Asakusa. She is aware that there is a tradition of comedic performance in the neighborhood, and the owners of Darling have suggested that she insert some humorous banter between songs to help meet local audience’s expectations. Ôno, however, would prefer to showcase only her music, as she
does at other Tokyo venues, and she always feels self-conscious about finding the right thing to say. If the audience detects her uncertainty, they do not show it, however, and chuckle along with her. Calmed by their favorable response, she announces her next number: Cole Porter’s “Night and Day” (1932). She turns and nods to her band, who begin the quick, syncopated instrumental opening. Comfortably back in her musical element, Ōno bounces her head gently with the swinging rhythms and again begins to sing.

**Analysis**

Ōno sees herself as a jazz singer, and she understands the music that she sings to be Western (mainly American) styles of popular music from several decades in the past. And although jazz and related genres like those that Ōno sings are widely performed and have a following with audiences throughout Japan, she considers Asakusa to have a comparatively strong retro jazz scene. Because jazz music gained significant popularity in Japan during the Shōwa period, she attributes the robustness of the neighborhood’s jazz activities to the persistence of Shōwa-period objects and practices that she—and many others participating in the trope of late-modern roman—perceives in Asakusa.4

**i. The sound of jazz music**

The repertoire Ōno sings is made up of songs that were written and first performed—in both the United States and Japan—in the early decades of Japan’s Shōwa period. She specializes in songs from the Great American Songbook, a repertoire made up of jazz standards performed widely by musicians in a variety of jazz idioms and widely known among their audiences. The music on her solo album, *Inspiration* (2003), is representative of the Great American Songbook and of the repertoire that she sings in her

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4 I have heard Ōno and many others refer to Asakusa as a town where the Shōwa period still remains (*Shōwa ga nokotte iru machi*).
live performances around Tokyo. As such, it includes popular and widely recorded songs written from the late 1920s through the late 1960s, created for Broadway musicals, Hollywood films, and some for original release on jazz albums.\(^5\) The only track which arguably is outside of the Great American Songbook is the most recent—“Wave,” a 1967 bossa nova tune by Antonio Carlos Jobim—but Ōno and many of her Japanese and American counterparts also consider 1950s and 60s bossa nova to be standard jazz repertoire as well, and so it is not particularly anomalous in this regard.

American popular music, including jazz and the earliest tunes that would become a part of the Great American Songbook, had begun to make their way to Japan by the 1920s and have remained a significant part of the country’s soundscape to this day. It was only (officially, if not in actual fact) hushed during a brief period when American music—and jazz in particular—was deemed “the music of the enemy” and rendered illegal by the statist national government from 1941 until the end of WWII.\(^6\) In his 2001 monograph on jazz in Japan, historian E. Taylor Atkins describes the music’s significance in the immediate post-war years in particular. In the late 1940s and early 50s, jazz was practically ubiquitous there, played on the radio as part of the American Occupation’s “democratic propaganda,” and performed by Japanese musicians, first to entertain the American troops, and

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E. Taylor Atkins writes of the complexity of the Japanese popular music scene during the war years, including the ways that jazz-like idioms were creatively adapted to avoid state sanctioning, and even used officially for nationalist propaganda purposes, in chapter two of *Blue Nippon* (E. Taylor Atkins, *Blue Nippon* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 125–163.
eventually many of their fellow citizens who had come to consume the music with fervor.\textsuperscript{7} The early 1950s experienced what was called a “Jazz Boom” in Japan, when urban (particularly Tokyo) adolescents and young adults attended jazz concerts in droves, screaming, clapping, and stomping in appreciation of their heroes performing onstage.\textsuperscript{8} Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong, Oscar Peterson, Roy Eldridge, Ben Webster, Ben Carter, Ray Brown, and other jazz giants all performed in Japan during those years, and Japanese musicians such as Fumio Nanri, Shiraki Hideo, Akiyoshi Toshiko, Kitamura Eiji, among many others, became proficient in and widely performed the music as well.

Although the jazz scene in Japan and elsewhere has changed in various ways over the intervening decades, Atkins also describes a “Jazz Restoration in Japan,” initiated consciously by the Paddle Wheel record company in 1994, that sought to recreate the pre-avant-garde jazz scene of the early 1950s.\textsuperscript{9} Young artists and audience members like Ōno began embracing the classic sounds from jazz’s “golden age” as a kind of “commodified nostalgia in the contemporary world.”\textsuperscript{10} Indeed, it would have been the late 1990s when Ōno encountered that Billie Holiday album while browsing her local record store, precisely the moment when the “Jazz Restoration” campaign had established a significant popularity. Caught in that commercial and cultural current, she developed a love for the neoclassical sound and standard jazz canon, and she has been perfecting her delivery of it ever since.

\textsuperscript{7} Atkins, \textit{Blue Nippon}, 171, 184–196.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 189. In addition to commenting on the nature and extent of jazz's popularity during those years, Atkins cites a 1954 survey of 214 jazz concert attendees, which revealed that the vast majority of the audience was between ages seventeen and twenty-three. Only eight attendees were between the ages of twenty-six and fifty.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 266–69.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 267.
ii. Ōno's late-modern roman musikscape

A seasoned musician and avid listener, Ōno executes the familiar melodies of her repertoire in a capable yet rather unembellished manner, and she engages in a “classic” jazz sound with which she aims to appeal to a wide general audience in Tokyo. Although she performs for audiences she considers to be made up more of her peer age group in some other parts of the city, she understands her audiences in contemporary Asakusa, in particular, to be largely of an older demographic who come to Darling to hear jazz because it evokes a nostalgia for a time period through which they actually lived and remember:

Asakusa is a town where Shōwa still strongly remains (Asakusa-tte, sugoku Shōwa ga nokotte iru machi desu ne). Jazz had not yet come into Japan in early Shōwa, but after the war, music like Dixieland jazz...did make a mark on people [here]...And locals in Asakusa tend to be older, and they are the kinds of people who appreciate that kind of music. In fact, the music that I specialize in is from a little bit later [than Dixieland], jazz after the 1930s...And so to help match the audience’s preferences, I mix in comedy [between songs]. But what I really want to do is convey the greatness of the music that I do, and so even though it’s not my true feelings, I add comedy [hoping people will appreciate that]...[All of this is] because [Asakusa is] a town where Shōwa carries on.

Thus, for Ōno, Asakusa is a distinctively late-modern roman place due to its older population and the steadfastly Shōwa-period cultural preferences that they maintain.

Although her understanding of the history of jazz in Japan lacks many details, Ōno rightly points out that jazz had a significant popularity there postbellum. She also seems to believe that earlier styles, such as Dixieland, were the ones that were more popular in Japan in the 1940s and 50s, rather than the more contemporary swing and bebop.

Indeed, the proportion of Taitō Ward’s population over the age of sixty-five is slightly higher than that of Shinjuku Ward, where Ōno also regularly performs.¹¹ Age does

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¹¹ Although data about the musical tastes of Tokyoites of different districts is beyond the scope of the present study, we can consult census records in order to verify the proportion of the population in particular districts that were at least old enough to have participated in and remember the Jazz Boom of the 1950s. People born in 1945, for instance, were young children in the early ’50s, and grew up amidst the American Occupation and
not necessarily correspond to a particular taste in music, however, and regardless of the actual age and taste of the individuals who do come through the door at Darling to hear her sing, what are more important to the present analysis are Ōno’s sense of place in Asakusa, and its ramifications on her musiking activities there. She understands the neighborhood to be one where the Shōwa period is still alive and well, maintained by an aged population with old-fashioned preferences.

Ōno’s musikscape in Asakusa is, therefore, anchored by the trope of late-modern roman. At its most focused, it is comprised almost exclusively by the musical sounds of her jazz performance at Darling. The space of the bar is sonically cut off from the outside urban environment, the sound of the music prominently fills the small venue, and audiences there sit quietly without disrupting the performance. Her sonic sense of place can be narrowly limited to only the intimate and nostalgic setting she helps create there. Between her musical numbers, however, Ōno must remind herself of her placement in a larger context in order to bring a particularly Asakusa practice to the way that she performs:

For a long time, Asakusa has been a comedy town (o-warai no machi). There is rakugo and manzai, and because there are things like that, I try to chat a bit in the breaks of the performance to make the customers laugh. They seem to think it’s interesting, and I’m comfortable doing that. But if I were to do that sort of thing in other places, the customers (she makes a contorted/irritated face) do that. Or they have no reaction at all... [Because people in Asakusa like older jazz], I mix in that comedy, and that is a way I try to match up with the audiences’ preferences.

the Jazz Boom. The adolescents and young adults participating in the music scene more actively would have been born in the late 1930s or earlier. The available census data does not specify numbers for detailed age groups, but it does provide numbers for those born in 1945 and earlier. For instance, in Shinjuku Ward, records indicate that in 2010, the percentage of the population over the age of 65 was 19.1%. This proportion is lower than the national average (23.0%), but comparable to the average across the city of Tokyo (20.2%) [Shinjuku-ku Shinjuku Jichi Sōzō Kenkyūjo, “2010 (Heisei 22) Nen Kokuseichōsa: ‘Jinkō-Tō Kihon Shūkei Kekka ~ Shinjuku-Ku No Gaiyō ~’ No Yōyaku” (Shinjuku-ku Shinjuku Jichi Sōzō Kenkyūjo, 2012)]. In Taitō Ward where Asakusa is located, however, the percentage of the population over age 65 in the same year was 24.1%, higher than both the city’s and country’s averages [Kumin-bu Koseki Jūmin Sābisu-ka, “Taitō-Ku No Nenrei-Betsu Jinkō (5-Sai Goto)” (Kumin-bu Koseki Jūmin Sābisu-ka, 2012)]. Thus Ōno is correct in her impression that the average audience in Asakusa might theoretically be older, and therefore have older musical taste, than those in other parts of the city where she performs.
Thus, by bringing light comedy into her jazz performance at Darling, Ōno is inflecting the soundscape of her performance with her broader notions about Asakusa as a particularly anachronistic neighborhood.

Her wider musikscape of Asakusa is also dominated by her ideas about the neighborhood as a late-modern *roman* place. She explained that existence of several jazz clubs in the area is central, in her mind, to the nature of Asakusa as a Shōwa-period neighborhood. As evidence of this, she pointed to two local venues in particular: Asakusa HUB, which features Dixieland music, and Soultrane, which stages mainly classic mid-century jazz styles, including samba and bossa nova. In reality, the music scene in Asakusa is also made up of several other venues that stage performances in a variety of popular music styles, including (American-style) folk, pop, blues, rock, and reggae, among many others, and it is therefore not strictly dominated by early- and mid-Shōwa-period genres preferred by the neighborhood’s ostensibly older audiences as Ōno describes.12

Furthermore, she is quite aware that Darling features musicians playing a wide variety of genres on other nights throughout a typical month. Thus, in constructing her larger Asakusa musikscape, Ōno omits a portion of the neighborhood’s soundscape from her consciousness. Because it is certain, from her own comments, that she is aware of at least a fraction of those more contemporary musical styles being performed there, I must conclude that she simply does not regard them as significantly contributing to the late-modern *roman* trope that she perceives to be most constitutive of Asakusa.

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12 A bar and music venue called Zinc Asakusa, located one block south of Kaminarimon, for instance, stages acts performing styles such as jazz, folk, and pop ([http://music.geocities.jp/zinc_asakusa/](http://music.geocities.jp/zinc_asakusa/)). Asakusa Kurawood, a few blocks farther south, has an even greater variety, including blues, boogie-woogie, rock, reggae, Spanish, Latin, Balkan, Irish, and Gypsy music ([http://kurawood.jp/](http://kurawood.jp/)).
Ōno is also aware of many of the other non-musical practices and activities that take place in the neighborhood; it would be practically impossible, for instance, for an adult life-long Tokyoite to remain unaware that Asakusa is the home of Sensō-ji, that it is a popular tourist destination, and that it is known to be a characteristically Shitamachi neighborhood. Furthermore, evidence on her Facebook page indicates that she does occasionally stroll through the nearby Sensō-ji’s precinct late at night after her gigs at Darling (Image 112). In speaking with me, however, she consistently characterized the neighborhood only in terms of its late-modern roman trope with which she frames her performances there.

Thus, because of her unique social positioning as a singer of mid-twentieth-century jazz and Tokyo native, Ōno and her audiences are able to access a particularly late-modern roman kind of Asakusa through a genre and repertoire that carry a Shōwa-period nostalgia for them. Her performance is, then, an effort to construct a late-modern roman musical time capsule, a dated sense of place through which she also apprehends the neighborhood at large, while quieting the rest of its diverse soundscape from her consciousness.
Interlude

*Chka-chka-chka-chka-chka.* A tourism helicopter flies low over Asakusa. The sound of its chopping rotor blades is puzzling for Ōno, who notices it as it flies directly overhead and wonders about its purpose—is it a traffic ‘copter monitoring a nearby highway, perhaps? It is exciting for a small girl, a student at the Sensō-ji Kindergarten, who enthusiastically points at the flying vehicle and shouts eagerly to her friends playing nearby in the schoolyard. But it is unremarkable and familiar for Okuzawa Makoto, a local resident and business owner, and he scarcely pays it any attention as he says a friendly “good morning” to his next-door neighbor and heads off to work.

II. Shitamachi Musiking in Asakusa

Okuzawa is an Asakusa local whose musikscape in the neighborhood is principally defined by the trope of Shitamachi. Okuzawa lives and works in Asakusa, and so he spends the vast majority of his time within the neighborhood’s heterogeneous sonic environment. He is a tax advisor and accountant who owns his own business in the area, and he also socially serves as an officer in his local chōkai (neighborhood association). In many ways, he is a fairly typical Asakusa resident. His parents lived in Asakusa before he was born, and his two older sisters were born there. In the late 1950s, the family moved across the river to the nearby neighborhood called Mukōjima in Sumida Ward, where Okuzawa was subsequently born and raised. He studied at Meiji University while still living at home with his parents in Mukōjima, but he moved to Asakusa in 1984 when he married, taking up residence in a house that his parents owned in Kaminarimon *icchōme* (the first district of Kaminarimon). Since 1988, he has owned a tax accounting office in the same district,
operating as its chief tax advisor. In recent years, the Okuzawas purchased a new house a few blocks away in Asakusa’s Komagata nichōme (the second district of Komagata) on the western bank of the Sumida River, and relocated their family there. He and his wife have twin young-adult children (a boy and a girl), who live in the family home while attending university, and with whom Okuzawa enjoys spending time on their common days off of work and school. He is also an ardent athlete: he practices karate weekly, swims in a local gym every morning, occasionally runs marathons, and is a recognized master in kendo (Japanese fencing), in which he holds the rank of seventh dan (level or grade; eighth dan is typically the highest rank possible in contemporary kendo).13

Soon after he first moved to Asakusa, Okuzawa became involved in the youth chapter of Kaminarimon Nishi-bu (The West Kaminarimon Branch), the chōkai associated with the segment of blocks in which his original home was located. Although he has moved to a different chōkai’s district, he still owns that original house—he rents it to Satō, an employee at his tax accounting office—and so he is able to maintain his membership in the Kaminarimon Nishi-bu chōkai, preserving the same community participation he has enjoyed for decades. Through the chōkai, he has been able to form friendships with his neighbors, to learn and pass on local traditions, and to volunteer his time and energy in service of his community. One significant task among his chōkai duties is to organize its members to participate in Asakusa’s annual Sanja Matsuri, an event that Okuzawa considers to be the climax of neighborhood’s community life. Although there are chōkai

13 It is through his position as the most senior kendo teacher at the Mukōjima Kenyūkai that I had the opportunity to become acquainted with Okuzawa. My husband and I were living in Sumida Ward, not far from the public middle schools where that kendo club practices each week. My husband, who had already begun studying kendo at the University of Michigan Kendo Club, was generously welcomed into the Mukōjima Kenyūkai when we visited their keiko shortly after our arrival in the city. From that time on, Okuzawa has been a patient and supportive sensei, and a generous friend, very giving of his time and of unique opportunities for my husband and me as expatriates in Japan.
throughout Tokyo and Japan at large, many of the purposes that they serve are, in Tokyo, strongly associated with Shitamachi culture, namely fostering a local identity and cultivating a community-oriented lifestyle.\textsuperscript{14} Okuzawa has very much enjoyed the Shitamachi culture his \textit{chōkai} has fostered, and he continues to be involved in the regular (non-youth) iteration of the group to this day.

A very enterprising and involved individual, most of Okuzawa’s myriad everyday activities—professional, familial, recreational, and communal—are based in Asakusa. With such a localized lifestyle, he has a great pride in the neighborhood, and he looks forward to Sanja Matsuri each year when all of Asakusa’s residents come together to celebrate their local Asakusa identity.

The Kaminarimon Nishi-bu \textit{chōkai}’s territory (indicated by the red shaded area on Map 10 and Map 11) is made up of the eight blocks that constitute the eastern half of Kaminarimon \textit{ichōme} (indicated by a larger encompassing red box on Map 11). This is a part of the neighborhood that is outside of tourists’ regular area of interest in the region north of Kaminarimon Street. Comprised mainly of apartment buildings and private residences, as well as a few businesses that cater to local inhabitants such as a hair salon, an osteopathic clinic, an antiques and trinkets shop, various mom-and-pop restaurants, and the like, Kaminarimon \textit{ichōme} has narrow interior streets which do not allow much traffic. Consequently, outside of the constant rumble of cars and buses on the thoroughfares that make up its northern and southern borders (Kaminarimon Street and Asakusa Street,

\textsuperscript{14} As Theodore C. Bestor explains, “in the thinking of many Japanese, …shitamachi [is] not simply a place but a way of life,” characterized as “friendly, openhearted, unpretentious, generous, and neighborly,” where “self-employed entrepreneurs play [a role] in open and informal community life.” This is in contrast to Yamanote in western Tokyo, “characterized by middle-class, white-collar sarariman households and their more ‘modern,’ ‘rational,’ outwardly affluent, and less community-oriented lifestyles” [Theodore C. Bestor, \textit{Neighborhood Tokyo} (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1989), 7, 31].
respectively), the everyday atmosphere of Kaminarimon Nishi-bu is that of a rather quiet residential neighborhood. Its soundscape is generally marked only by Asakusa's trope of Shitamachi due to its inherent positioning and the activities of its inhabitants.
Okuzawa’s original home in Asakusa is located within the heart of the chōkai’s territory (indicated by a red star on Map 11), and so it is surrounded by that relatively serene neighborhood ambience. His tax accounting office, on the other hand, is located directly on the busy Kaminarimon Street (indicated by a green star on Map 11).
business activities that normally take place there produce normal office sounds, such as the pattering of fingers on calculators and computer keyboards, but which are quiet enough to be audible only inside the office’s walls. It is very close to the street, however, located only on the second floor of a multi-story building, and its anterior wall opens onto a balcony overlooking that boulevard. Consequently, on typical days the traffic noise of the busy street can also be easily heard there. In addition, the loud sounds of occasional special events in the neighborhood have a significant, if temporary, impact on the sonic environment inside the office. I was able to witness this firsthand when, in August of 2012, Okuzawa invited my husband and me to watch the Asakusa Samba Carnival from his office balcony. We watched as scores of samba groups paraded down Kaminarimon Street, dancing in their flashy costumes and with their music blaring loudly from speakers.

Image 113. A view of the Samba Carnival, looking east down Kaminarimon Street from Okuzawa’s office balcony.
mounted on moving trucks (see Image 113, Video 9). The sounds of the carnival pulsed through the office and could be heard for blocks in every direction.

Okuzawa’s family’s current home is located south of Kaminarimon Nishi-bu on the bank of the Sumida River, in the territory of the Komagata chōkai (indicated by a blue star on Map 11). That area is also quiet and residential, with relatively little street traffic. With the back of the house overlooking the river, however, boat motors can sometimes be heard there, especially from the terrace on the roof. One notable sonic event that does impact the home once each year is the Sumida River Fireworks Convention, when the sounds of pyrotechnics explode upon the neighborhood’s soundscape (see Video 10). The Okuzawas are proud to have front-row seats for the convention—the southernmost of the two boats from which the fireworks are set off is moored every year in the middle of the river directly behind their house—and they host an annual party to gather with friends to watch (and hear) the show from their roof terrace.

Sanja Matsuri is also a sonic event with a limited duration in his neighborhood, but for Okuzawa, it is the highlight of the year and a phenomenon that strongly defines Asakusa. In fact, when asked to use a map to delineate the boundaries of Asakusa, he literally equated the festival territory with the neighborhood, explaining simply that Asakusa is composed of the areas that celebrate Sanja Matsuri. For the weekend of the festival (held each year on the third weekend of May), Okuzawa returns to Kaminarimon Nishi-bu to join his longtime friends and neighbors to carry out the chōkai’s role in the event.

Sanja Matsuri as a whole is an enormous undertaking, with events spanning four days and involving not only the members and residents of neighborhood’s forty-four chōkai,
but also attracting between one and two million tourists each year.\(^{15}\) It is one of countless neighborhood festivals held throughout Tokyo, but it is unquestionably one of the largest and most boisterous, and it is an event for which Asakusa is very well known by people throughout the city and beyond. The roles of individual chōkai like Kaminarimon Nishi-bu begin on the Friday afternoon of the festival, when each of them carry their mikoshi from their year-long storage area into the precinct of Asakusa Shrine. There, a ritual is held through which each of them is imbued with the spirits of the three tutelary deities of the neighborhood. The mikoshi then go back to their home districts where they will be used in the activities of the following two days.

For several hours on Saturday afternoon, the members of each chōkai parade their own mikoshi through the streets. Mikoshi are massive objects, the size and weight of a small car, and require dozens of people working together to shoulder them through the neighborhood. They chant in rhythm together, synchronizing their steps and their breath, pressed up against one another with perspiration dripping on every forehead. For believers, to help carry the mikoshi is not only a chance to interact with the divine spirits temporarily housed inside, and to march them through one’s own neighborhood to survey and to bless the land and its people.\(^{16}\) For believers and non-believers alike, it is also to participate in this strenuous endeavor with one’s fellow Asakusa-ites. Scores of people gather around the mikoshi as they are heaved through the streets waiting for a turn to squeeze between their

\(^{15}\) For the full schedule of the festival see the Asakusa Shrine’s webpage:

\(^{16}\) Although strictly speaking Sanja Matsuri is a Shinto religious festival, Okuzawa and many other participants do not engage in the spiritual meanings of the event as much as they do the communal bonding and the affirming of local identity. In my experience, individuals have varying degrees of belief in the mythology of Sanja Matsuri, with some participating in it only as a community event, with no engagement in its religious functions. At Sanja Matsuri in 2012, as we stood watching the Kaminarimon Nishi-bu mikoshi be carried through the streets, I asked my friend Masaki if there were kami (Shinto deities) inside. He replied a the slightest curl of a smile forming on his lips, “Tabun (maybe)."
neighbors, hoist the divine palanquin upon their shoulders, and join the rhythm of the
march. Many others are too intimidated to participate so actively, and join the procession
simply to watch and socialize, perhaps adding some sonic support to the chanters’ rhythm
by clapping along in time.

Each of these processions is led by a designated chōkai member armed with hyōshigi
(oblong wooden blocks), which he beats together in rhythmic signals to coordinate the
chants and steps of those carrying the mikoshi (Image 115). To further enliven this entire
uproarious exploit, a musical ensemble called a matsuri-bayashi play their special festival
music from a yatai, which is pulled behind the mikoshi crew by other chōkai members
(Image 116). The group performs almost constantly during the mikoshi’s procession, acting
as a lively musical backdrop for the entire event.

On the Sunday of the festival, each chōkai again parades their mikoshi through their
own district in the same manner. On this day, however, the three main mikoshi of Asakusa
Shrines are also taken out to be paraded through the entire neighborhood, each of them to a different section. Their routes are scheduled, and so each chōkai knows when one of them will arrive in their district. At the designated time, chōkai residents put down their own mikoshi and join the larger, wilder procession. The deities inside of the main mikoshi are
evidently even more potent, as the crowd becomes an electrified seething mass, chanting, shouting, and shaking the palanquin in rhythm through the narrow city streets (see Image 117 and Video 11). The intense parade of the main *mikoshi* is the peak of the festival action within the territory of each *chôkai*, and if the procession of its own *mikoshi* transformed the quiet district of Kaminarimon Nishi-bu, the arrival of one of the main *mikoshi* practically drives it into another dimension.

The organizing and carrying out these processions is the primary role of Kaminarimon Nishi-bu during Sanja Matsuri each year. Okuzawa has served the *chôkai* in several different capacities over the decades, helping to carry the *mikoshi* countless times, and leading the procession with the distinctive festival *hyôshigi* as an officer in the *chôkai*’s youth chapter. Now, as a senior officer, Okuzawa is exempt from the heavier labor, and instead does more administrative and managerial work. During the festival itself, he and
the other senior officers dress in matching chic *yukata* (light-weight cotton kimono) and gather on the outskirts of the crowd, providing direction when necessary, and generally acting as the leadership of the *chōkai* (Image 118). Despite serving in this less strenuous role, Okuzawa is still immersed in the uproarious soundscape of the festival, all of which he is intimately familiar with as a longtime participant. He considers the sounds of Sanja Matsuri, and the *matsuri-bayashi* music in particular, to be defining sounds of Asakusa. Moreover, the festival’s sounds are especially meaningful to him as they are created as a part of an event through which he and his neighbors invest their neighborhood with an aura of communal identity. In carrying out their local traditions during Sanja Matsuri to this end, Okuzawa and his fellow Asakusa-ites reinforce the community-oriented values for

![Image 118. Okuzawa in his festival *yukata* at Sanja Matsuri in 2012. He is holding a *harae gushi* (Shinto ritual wand) labeled with the name of the Kaminarimon Nishi-bu *chōkai*. The *chōkai’s mikoshi* procession and the Tokyo Skytree can be seen in the background.](image)

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which Asakusa, as a Shitamachi neighborhood, is known.

Outside of his tax work and chōkai activities, Okuzawa participates in various pastimes in Asakusa outside of Kaminarimon Nishi-bu’s territory. He goes daily to the gym in the ROX department store complex in the Rokku area, he practices karate several blocks to the south at a dojo near Kuramae Station, and he and his family frequent many restaurants and other establishments throughout the general vicinity. Like most Tokyoites, he also understands Sensō-ji to be an important defining feature of the neighborhood as well, and he occasionally visits there to pray when he has an important request for Kannon-sama. Okuzawa walks the streets of the neighborhood on a daily basis, and he is knowledgeable about its diverse hustle and bustle.

Below I describe a scene from Okuzawa’s fundamental Shitamachi musikscape in Asakusa, his experience of sound and place during Sanja Matsuri. I will then go on to analyze his Asakusa musikscape with reference to his musiking practice, the nature of his agency, his relationships to Asakusa’s cultural tropes, the diverse range of sounds he encounters there, and finally his changeable sense of place that arises from these factors.

**Sonic Scene:**
**Okuzawa’s Shitamachi Musikscape in Kaminarimon Nishi-bu**

Okuzawa’s Shitamachi musikscape in Asakusa is most manifest during the weekend of Sanja Matsuri. On the Sunday afternoon of the festival, Okuzawa struts through the crowded streets of Asakusa in his white tabi socks and zori sandals, proudly conscious of his handsome yukata. This day is the peak of his year as a chōkai officer. It is the final afternoon in a series of three hectic days, coming at the end of several months of planning and preparation, and so Okuzawa is tired but also energized. Kaminarimon Nishi-bu
residents have been parading their *mikoshi* through Asakusa for several hours already, but the highlight of the festival is still yet to come, when they will have the chance to parade one of Asakusa Shrine’s main *mikoshi* through their own streets. Okuzawa and his fellow *chōkai* officers have accompanied their *mikoshi* crew, guiding them through their route and have acted as the leadership of the neighborhood association.

All still in very high spirits, the group has just come out from the covered shopping street of Kannon Street after finishing their scheduled tour of central Asakusa. All of the roads in Asakusa are closed to regular traffic, and the sounds of over one hundred *mikoshi* processions dominate the neighborhood. The Kaminarimon Nishi-bu *mikoshi* crew chants in time as they vigorously shoulder their heavy load across the wide Kaminarimon Street and back into their home territory. “Essa – ha – essa – ha” (see Video 12). Some individuals punctuate the chant with contrasting syllables, inserting new rhythms on the offbeat of the dominant one. People add or subtract their voices as they join or leave the carrying crew, respectively, or simply when they feel compelled to do so while under the weight of the *mikoshi*. The leader occasionally inserts strikes on his *hyōshigi* on every other beat to give directional signals (forward, backward, stop, etc.) and further motivate the crew. Other members similarly add sporadic punctuations with whistles, and many others surrounding the laboring crew clap along in encouragement.

All the while, a few meters away the *chōkai*’s *matsuri-bayashi* ensemble plays their traditional festival music from their portable wooden cart, adding another spirited sonic

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17 Each *chōkai* has the opportunity to do parade their *mikoshi* outside of their own district on a set course through the blocks of the neighborhood immediately surrounding Sensō-ji, physically enacting their community ties with that core section of Asakusa that includes the temple and shrine precincts.

layer to the procession.\textsuperscript{19} Although their music is essential to this affair, rather than coordinating their tempo to match that of the chanters (indeed, they are often too far from the \textit{mikoshi} crew, and the festival commotion is often too great for them to be able to hear the chanters’ beat clearly), the ensemble makes musical choices independent of the crew’s pulse. Whirling flute melodies and syncopated percussion, the \textit{matsuri-bayashi}’s music for the procession is fast and animated, and it becomes juxtaposed with the march cadence of the chant, creating a multi-tempo flurry of sound.

The \textit{mikoshi} crew makes their way from the broad thoroughfare of Kaminarimon Street back into the narrow streets of their own territory. A group of small boys dressed in festival garb watches the scene with great interest from a second-story window; one boy claps his hands in time with the chanters’ beat, celebrating his \textit{chōkai}’s team and lending his own small sonic encouragement (Image 119). Amid all of this commotion, Okuzawa has been a relatively quiet but visible supporter of the \textit{chōkai}’s entire clamorous enterprise. He

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image119.jpg}
\caption{Small boys watch the Kaminarimon Nishi-bu \textit{mikoshi} crew pass by from a second-story window.}
\end{figure}

has enjoyed all of these very familiar sights and sounds and has taken pride in his fellow Asakusa-ites’ great efforts in successfully carrying out this time-honored communal tradition. Now, he thinks, it is time for the Kaminarimon Nishi-bu crew to take a short break to rest before the main mikoshi arrives in their district. As the crew begins to approach the wooden stand where they can safely put down their heavy load, Okuzawa bounds forward and instructs the leader to signal to the crew to stop their procession.

The younger man nods. He climbs up onto a raised platform allowing him to see clearly, and accurately guide the mikoshi safely onto its wooden stand (see Video 13). Striking the hyōshigi, he guides the crew slowly into place as they continue their raucous synchronized chant. When he is sure it is properly positioned, he gives the signal to stop, striking the wooden clappers several times in very quick succession. The crew slows and then halts their bouncing march, their chant also falling silent as they carefully place the mikoshi upon its stand. The crowd claps to congratulate the group on their successful procession through the neighborhood. The matsuri-bayashi continues playing its music, more audible now in the absence of the chant, to maintain that festive sonic backdrop for the time being. Okuzawa observes all of this and nods his head in approval of the leader’s capable management of the crew’s energy.

One man in the midst of the crew shouts out over the now-chattering group, “san-bon de shimete! (Wrap it up with hand clapping!)” The leader then raises his hyōshigi and calls out, “san-bon de shimemashō! (Let’s wrap it up with hand clapping!)” The matsuri-bayashi finally falls silent as everyone in the crowd responds in unison. They raise their voices in a spirited cry, “Iyō—,” and then clap their hands together in a fast rhythmic pattern, punctuated by vocal shouts, as a celebratory final gesture. Okuzawa nods again in
approval, very satisfied that the last day of Sanja Matsuri in Kaminarimon Nishi-bu is running smoothly and that everyone is having a good time together. He turns to his neighbor and fellow officer and suggests they sit down for a moment and have a beer to discuss the upcoming final hours of chōkai’s festival activities.

Analysis

Okuzawa interacts with the neighborhood as a native resident, and he considers himself and its other residents to be members of a common community defined by their setting in Asakusa. He has been a member of his local chōkai for thirty-five years. He understands it to be an important social group for residents of the sub-district of Kaminarimon Nishi-bu through which they work together to maintain a safe and peaceful local community, and pass on local history and traditions from one generation to the next. One such tradition is Sanja Matsuri, a religious festival which has a history of seven hundred years in the neighborhood, but is also a major tourist draw for Asakusa.20 However, as a chōkai officer, Okuzawa understands the festival as a means through which the organization functions to pass on the neighborhood’s customs to younger residents, and an opportunity to come together to celebrate and act out their communal identity.

Certainly, chōkai and similar Shinto festivals exist in neighborhoods and towns in other parts of Tokyo and throughout Japan.21 Because Asakusa is in Tokyo’s Shitamachi, however, it is easy to frame the communal values that Sanja Matsuri enacts and reinforces as consistent with common notions of Shitamachi life. Okuzawa himself described the neighborhood in this way:

Well, as you might expect, like anywhere in Shitamachi, [Asakusa] is a place where the connections between people are deep (hito to hito no kakari ga fukai tokoro). So people know things about one another, both good and bad. And of course living in Asakusa, there is Sanja Matsuri, and there are various events. It’s a town where you can feel all four seasons. In the end, for that reason, there is warmth between people, although they are also sometimes nosy, and so Asakusa has an image that is unique.

As Okuzawa points out, Sanja Matsuri is only one of many annual events in Asakusa that residents take part in as a community, fortifying their strong Shitamachi interpersonal connections. Through his involvement in the Kaminarimon Nishi-bu chōkai, however, it is the event in which he plays the most active role. For this reason, the sounds that he and his fellow residents make as part of Sanja Matsuri are emblematic of his Shitamachi musiking in the neighborhood.22

**i. The sounds of Sanja Matsuri**

Okuzawa pointed to the festival’s matsuri-bayashi as a quintessential sound of Asakusa:

[The most prototypical Asakusa sound?] That has to be the matsuri-bayashi. Of course when we hear matsuri-bayashi, it brings Sanja Matsuri to mind for Asakusa people... It is the main [sound] of Sanja Matsuri (Sanja Matsuri no mein desu).

*Matsuri-bayashi* ensembles like the ones heard at Sanja Matsuri are made up of an ō-daiko (large barrel drum), at least two smaller taiko (drums), a kane (small hand-held bronze gong), and a takebue (seven-holed bamboo flute, see Image 116 on page 277 above). They play in syncopated counterpoint, with the takebue providing a spirited, highly ornamented melody over the percussion's dynamic rhythms and shifting pulses. During Sanja Matsuri, there are dozens of such ensembles playing throughout Asakusa, both on movable carts accompanying the mikoshi processions like the one in Kaminarimon Nishi-bu, but also a small number of more experienced groups performing on stationary stages at certain key

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22 My analysis of Sanja Matsuri is partially informed by my own participation in the event as a member of the Kaminarimon Nishi-bu chōkai's mikoshi crew in 2012 at the invitation of Okuzawa.
locations in the neighborhood’s core. To be sure, the distinctive sound of matsuri-bayashi music is one that is deliberately created in Asakusa for the festival, and it is ubiquitous throughout the neighborhood during that event.

There are matsuri-bayashi ensembles that perform very similar music at many local festivals held throughout Tokyo and beyond, however, and so for many Japanese people, this kind of music carries associations with festivals in general and not necessarily Sanja Matsuri or any other Shitamachi festival in particular. Indeed, historical evidence suggests that the tradition of festival ensembles of flutes, drums, and gongs may have very ancient roots in Japan. The tradition of such ensembles playing music for Shinto festivals like Sanja Matsuri, however, seems to have its origins in the eighteenth century among the feudal commoners in the Edo (Tokyo) area.23 Although today there are several established matsuri-bayashi on the Yamanote side of the city as well, Shitamachi was the home of Edo’s commoners and maintains several matsuri-bayashi ensembles to this day, including Asakusa’s own so-called Edo-bayashi ensemble.

Each of the city’s major matsuri-bayashi ensembles is associated with a specific shrine in Tokyo; there is the Shinagawa-bayashi in Shinagawa, the Meguro-bayashi in Meguro, and the Kanda-bayashi in Kanda. They all share a common repertoire of four principal numbers, but they have come to play them with certain regional differences in


The earliest record of matsuri-bayashi in the Edo area date to the early eighteenth century. One matsuri-bayashi group, the Kasai-bayashi of the Kasai Shrine in present-day Edogawa Ward, is officially designated by the national government as an Intangible Cultural Property, and they claim to be the original matsuri-bayashi group of Tokyo, although at least one other ensemble, the Waka-bayashi, also claims to be the original (Fujie, “Effects of Urbanization on Matsuri-Bayashi in Tokyo,” 39–40).
instrumentation and musical interpretation. Asakusa’s Edo-bayashi, therefore, has its own distinctive sound for those well versed enough to recognize it. With its historical roots in the culture of Edo’s commoners, matsuri-bayashi in general, and certainly Edo-bayashi in particular, can be said to be a distinctly Shitamachi musical sound. Matsuri-bayashi music is, however, a traditional/folk style whose nuances of execution are not common knowledge for the vast majority of non-performers. And because it is performed throughout the city, many people do not know of its Shitamachi roots. Okuzawa is no exception, as he did not describe matsuri-bayashi as being a sound especially unique to Sanja Matsuri or Asakusa, but rather that, as an Asakusa resident, the festival music typifies his own neighborhood in his mind. By naming matsuri-bayashi as the principal sound of Sanja Matsuri and therefore the most emblematic sound of Asakusa, he also revealed the centrality of Sanja Matsuri in his conception of the neighborhood.

*Matsuri-bayashi* is the primary music that is purposefully created at Sanja Matsuri, and so it is unsurprising that it would come to mind for Okuzawa when asked about paradigmatic sounds of the neighborhood. There are other sonic activities inherent to the festival, however, that he did not mention so pointedly, but in which he has played a more direct role, and of which he therefore has a more informed understanding. One such sound is the clacking rhythms created by the *mikoshi* crew leader to signal instructions to those carrying the portable shrine. As a former leader and crewmember, Okuzawa is intimately

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familiar with the rhythmic patterns that the leader must produce by clapping together his pair of large wooden *hyōshigi*. He explains:

The *hyōshigi* are purely used to lead the forward movement of the *mikoshi*. For instance, if the rhythm of the people carrying the *mikoshi* is not in sync, the *mikoshi* will not move forward, or have the same up and down movement. In that kind of situation, they should match the rhythm of the person hitting the *hyōshigi*, and [the *hyōshigi*] also lead [the crew’s] movement when the *mikoshi* starts and ends [its procession]. It is said to have the same meaning as the conductor of an orchestra.

The rhythmic pattern played throughout the *mikoshi* procession is used to instruct the group to move and to regulate their pulse. The crew knows, for instance, that when the leader strikes the *hyōshigi* together in the rhythm indicated in Example 5, they should work together to match the speed of their steps and chanting, and to carry their jostling heavy load forward.

Example 5. The rhythmic pattern in which *mikoshi* leaders in Asakusa strike their *hyōshigi* to signal forward movement and to regulate their crew’s pulse.

Okuzawa is deeply familiar with the chant of the *mikoshi* crew. The chants are referred to as *kakegoe*, a general term for shouts used to time or encourage a particular activity. *Mikoshi* crews around Japan have a variety of set *kakegoe* syllables that they commonly use at festivals. Each of these set *kakegoe* syllables are paired with different ways to carry the *mikoshi* (*katsugi-kata*; shaking versus swaying, for instance), and they tend to differ depending on region. The manner of carrying *mikoshi*, and its accompanying *kakegoe*, that is famously used in Tokyo is known as *Edo-mae katsugi* (Edo-style carrying).\(^{25}\) In *Edo-mae katsugi*, the *mikoshi* crew bounces and shakes the *mikoshi* as they

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carry it through the streets, chanting together with the kakegoe of “essa, essa, essa” and/or “soiya, soiya, soiya.” This manner of kakegoe is the basis for the chant used by the Kaminarimon Nishi-bu mikoshi crew. The majority of the group calls out these syllables together in synchrony, while others arbitrarily elaborate on that principal chant by adding contrasting syllables at regular intervals. This concerted sonic action is not strictly orchestrated, and people add or subtract their voices as they join or leave the carrying crew, or as they feel compelled to do so. Consequently, the sonic texture fluctuates as individuals spontaneously make choices to come in and fall out. The pulse of the chant is constant, however, and other residents accompanying the mikoshi crew through the streets also may choose at any time to clap or otherwise shout in encouragement, matching the beat of the crew’s kakegoe. While everyone’s regular pulse facilitates the crew’s bodily synchronization to accomplish their arduous task, it also unites all the accompanying participants in that common goal. Furthermore, beyond simply chanting in unison, the complex sonic texture that the group collaboratively creates brings an even greater feverishness to the scene and further energizes the mikoshi crew.

This sonic texture can be observed in the chant of Kaminarimon Nishi-bu’s mikoshi crew transcribed in Example 6 and heard in Video 14. In referencing that example, Unit 1 of the chant is the most prominent, and it is vocalized constantly, without a definite pitch. Unit 2 fills in the rhythm where Unit 1 is resting, although it is less pronounced in the recording, and was less prominent in the Kaminarimon Nishi-bu crew’s chant overall the year of my fieldwork. However, the syllables of Units 1 and 2 are both the ones most commonly associated with Edo-mae katsugi-kata, as described above. Chanters come in or drop out at will, joining any existing unit in the texture they like, or adding their own rhythm and
syllable spontaneously, creating a dense and fluctuating hocket pattern. The pitches transcribed in Units 3 through 6 are not prescribed pitches, but rather those that were arbitrarily agreed upon by the chanters in the process of unifying their sound. The transcription is a simplified visual of all units heard at some point in Video 14. The sonic reality is quite variable, as certain units come into and out of earshot depending on which individuals are chanting and where the listener (or recording device) is situated in relation to the group. Crewmembers who are not presently carrying the mikoshi are also heard clapping their hands in time with the chanters’ beat, and the hyōshigi can be heard
intermittently striking the rhythm transcribed above in Example 5. Because mikoshi crews’ kakegoe are un-orchestrated and spontaneous, the particular way that the Kaminarimon Nishi-bu group works together to vocally accomplish their task is inherently sonically distinctive. It is also, however, collaborative and communal, in the spirit of Okuzawa’s conception of Shitamachi, and in the tradition of the Edo-mae mikoshi-carrying style for which Asakusa is known.

Another collaborative and communal sound of Sanja Matsuri described in the above musikscape sonic scene is the tejime, or ceremonial hand-clapping, which the mikoshi crew carried out to mark the end of their parade session. Tejime is practiced in various parts of Japan—there are Tokyo and Osaka styles, for instance—normally to observe the end of special events such as ceremonial family occasions (i.e. a wedding), business negotiations, corporate meetings, and community festivals like Sanja Matsuri. It is also customarily practiced at kabuki theater rehearsals, where it is said to have originated. While there are different rhythmic patterns that are clapped as tejime—depending on region and the momentousness of a given occasion—the important defining features of the practice overall are that it marks a communal event by uniting all participants in a collective act, producing a sense of successful completion.

The tejime rhythmic pattern that is considered the “national standard” is the one performed by mikoshi crews like Kaminarimon Nishi-bu’s at Sanja Matsuri in Asakusa. It is known as the Edo form (Edo-kata), and it is distinguished by a three-part triple rhythm, punctuated by a final single clap (see Example 7 and Video 13, 0:42-0:50). The symbolic meaning of this rhythmic pattern concerns the number of claps that comprise it, and a play

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on the meaning of certain Chinese characters. The rhythm is made up of three sets of three (nine), plus one. The Chinese character for the word *nine* is 九 (kyū), but when one extra stroke is added (丸, maru), a new character/word is formed with the meaning of “complete,” “entirety,” or “whole.” Thus, another purpose of *tejime* when using the Edo-kata rhythm is to convey a sense that “everything is completely settled” (*subete maruku osamaru*, i.e. the event has finished well), celebrated through this collective kinetic and sonic act.27

Example 7. The Edo-kata *tejime* rhythm.

ii. Okuzawa’s Shitamachi musikscape

Although they are essential to his activities as a *chōkai* member, the sounds of Sanja Matsuri are only a few of the many sounds that Okuzawa encounters as an Asakusa resident. To analyze how Okuzawa attends to Asakusa’s soundscape montage, let us consider first his experience of sonic emplacement in one of its narrowest moments: in his tax office on Kaminarimon Street. He described his work there in a way that echoed his description of the interconnected and cooperative nature of Shitamachi life:

> Because I am a tax consultant, I am based in this office; I have customers from Asakusa, and some from elsewhere too. And since everyone’s work concerns taxes, my role is to *support everyone* in that way (my emphasis).

His office is also physically located in the same neighborhood in which he lives, and so he is able to provide his services for his own neighbors, a circumstance that he also pointed to as central to defining Shitamachi. The sounds created there are not particularly distinctive to

27 Ibid.

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Shitamachi, however, and are instead the ordinary office sounds created as a part of conducting business in similar settings around the world:

Well, in my work, when we are doing calculations, once in a while we will play our own music, but... the sounds that are flowing there every day are the sounds of typing on computers and using calculators. As for music, during work time there really isn’t any. But, as you might expect, I am hearing the rhythm of typing on computers and calculators every day.

Although the sounds of traffic are also almost always audible there, Okuzawa did not mention any outside noises at all when describing the sonic environment of his office. With this in mind, I infer that Okuzawa considers the computer and calculator sounds that he and his employees make as part of their tax office work to constitute a soundscape. They spring from the activities that mark the office as a contemporary place of business. Those sounds are a byproduct rather than the purpose of their work, but Okuzawa named the pattering of keys—at the exclusion of other audible sounds—as the significant ones of the office since they are created by the activities that define that place in his understanding. Indeed, in constructing his musikscape inside the office, he has become accustomed to tuning out the street sounds in order to concentrate on his work. This was made especially apparent to me when I was invited to visit his office to watch the Samba Carnival parade. While his guests enjoyed the blast and spectacle from his balcony, Okuzawa remained engrossed and focused on a business task at his desk, all but oblivious to the music and festive commotion just yards away on the street.

At other times, Okuzawa’s attention broadens and his musikscape expands to include the greater district of Kaminarimon Nishi-bu. On typical days, it is marked mainly by the everyday, peaceful sounds of local residents and businesses common in Shitamachi residential areas. As described in the sonic scene above, however, during Sanja Matsuri,
residents of Kaminarimon Nishi-bu work together purposefully within their home territory to carry out their festival duties, drastically altering its soundscape and, consequently, Okuzawa’s sense of sonic emplacement in it. The festival involves not only Kaminarimon Nishi-bu, but also forty-three other districts (machî) that are part of the Asakusa Shrine parish (Map 10 on page 271, above). The sonic transformation of the neighborhood during the festival period is, therefore, not limited to Kaminarimon Nishi-bu, and Okuzawa inevitably hears the festival sounds created by residents and members of many other chôkai. As a member and officer of Kaminarimon Nishi-bu, however, his attention is often focused on the happenings of his own chôkai’s mikoshi parade. As he performs his duties, his attention is centered upon the chant of his own mikoshi crew, the signals of the crew’s leader, the voices of his fellow officers as they coordinate the group, and—in as much as he is aware of it as an essential background sound of the festival—Kaminarimon Nishi-bu’s matsuri-bayashi ensemble. Okuzawa and the district’s other residents create those special festival sounds within the boundaries of their home territory, articulating their status as local community within Asakusa.

The sounds of the neighborhood’s dozens of mikoshi crews are not significantly different from one another, however. Asakusa as a whole is known for its own local Edo-bayashi festival music, and for carrying mikoshi and chanting in the Edo-mae katsugi manner. Observing these Asakusa customs, the Kaminarimon Nishi-bu’s mikoshi crew does not, therefore, distinguish itself sonically from among the other Asakusa chôkai, but instead unites with all of them in a common endeavor of pan-Asakusa community declaration and enactment. Members of each chôkai have opportunities to interact with one another at various times during the festival, when encountering one another’s mikoshi crews on
shared streets, for instance, or when carrying one of Asakusa Shrine’s three main mikoshi, which belong collectively to all of them. Okuzawa revealed that his musikscape during the festival does at times expand to this broad neighborhood-wide extent when he named matsuri-bayashi music to be not a sound of his own chōkai specifically, but a sonic emblem of Asakusa as a whole. Furthermore, although he is aware of the neighborhood’s other diverse activities throughout the year, he named Sanja Matsuri as the defining feature of Asakusa for him, and so its sounds are the ones that anchor his musikscape of the neighborhood overall. In carving out his wider Asakusa musikscape, he quiets much of the neighborhood’s heterogeneous soundscape montage. He tunes into, and participates in creating, the sounds that typify the processes of community-building and support that are central to his conception of Asakusa as a Shitamachi neighborhood.
Chapter 7

Conclusion: Asakusa Ondo

“[Asakusa] is like a complicated collage... A whole range of people gather here expecting different things, but also different sorts of things happen because lots of people come. As long as many different kinds of people exist, it will continue to be this way. Maybe because it burned down once.”

- Oshow

I. Overlapping Soundscapes, Overlapping Tropes

In this dissertation, I set out to provide a system for understanding the ways people make sense of sound, music, and place in dense, diverse urban environments. Through the six preceding case studies, I demonstrated how differently situated agents in Asakusa construct personal and meaningful sonic senses of place for themselves, and how those constructions can be analyzed with my theoretical model of soundscape montage. Although each individual anchored their Asakusa musikscape to one of the neighborhood’s tropes most strongly, they also inevitably encountered other tropes to varying degrees. As was discussed in Chapter 3, Asakusa’s six tropes are themselves not mutually exclusive. Even in musiking with only one type of music or sound, no individual operating in a specific soundscape within the neighborhood can engage with only one of its tropes in isolation. Fukui’s staging of *Tsugaru-jamisen* at Waentei-Kikkō, for example, is not exclusively an engagement with tradition, it also prominently intersects with entertainment and tourism. Similarly, Okuzawa’s participation in Sanja Matsuri is not solely tied to Shitamachi, it is also
a traditional and spiritual act. And Ōno’s performance of the classic jazz at Darling is not simply an act of late-modern *roman*, it is tied to Shitamachi, entertainment, and tourism as well.

Thus, each person plays a multifaceted role in Asakusa’s soundscape montage, and contributes to the neighborhood’s unique local character in their own way (see Figure 8 below). That character is created, negotiated, and interpreted as both an individual and a collective act. Each person has their own experience of the neighborhood, but they are also

Figure 8. A representation of Asakusa’s tropes, and an approximation of the preceding six consultants’ configuration within those tropes’ overlapping soundscapes (image created with the assistance of Julia Matteson Hill).
all interconnected through larger overlapping cultural categories. Although Asakusa is made up of densely situated and diverse happenings, it maintains a clear and discrete sense of place within the city. Juxtaposed soundscapes working in montage enable a collective experience of coherence.

Not all sounds created in Asakusa are necessarily associated with one of its six tropes, but may occur there as larger soundscapes overlap with the neighborhood. Moreover, many sounds that do correlate with one or more of its tropes may also be a part of larger soundscapes that overlap with Asakusa (i.e. Tsugaru-jamisen, jazz, and international tourism, see Figure 9). In other words, Asakusa’s heterogeneous soundscape montage is not only personal, local, and communal, it is global as well.

Figure 9. A representation of the ways that soundscapes, large and small, overlap and afford a complex and manifold range of sonic experiences of place.
To demonstrate, I present the case of Asakusa Jinta and its performance of “Asakusa Ondo.” Asakusa Jinta is a band whose musiking not only references all six of the neighborhood’s tropes, but also strategically makes use of musical genres of to render Asakusa simultaneously global and local. “Asakusa Ondo” is a song that not only maps sites and sounds in Asakusa, but also indexes how its performers define the neighborhood in their cosmopolitan world. This analysis also reveals the broader implications of examining Asakusa as a montage of soundscapes, illustrating how this theoretical model might be fruitfully applied in countless other contexts outside of this one Tokyo neighborhood.

II. Musiking Asakusa’s Soundscape Montage

The creator, lead singer, and bassist for Asakusa Jinta is Oshow (a stage name spelled oshō [和尚] in Japanese, literally meaning “a master of one’s art” or “a Buddhist high priest”).¹ Unlike the six individuals profiled in the preceding case studies, Oshow deliberately engages with the broad popular identity of Asakusa. He purposefully and creatively incorporates multifarious popular images of the neighborhood in his songs, while also combining Asakusa sounds with those from the broader Tokyo metropolitan area, throughout contemporary Japan, and beyond.

Oshow’s musiking with Asakusa Jinta is rooted in his personal history. Born in Setagaya Ward in western Tokyo in 1966, Oshow initially pursued a career in the visual arts, although he was an inquisitive listener and an active amateur musician from the time he was a young man. As a high school student, he sang vocals for a punk rock group, and in university, for a rockabilly band. After graduation, he worked as a fine arts teacher for eight

¹ “Oshow,” spelled with a double-u, is his own preferred romanization of his stage name, which he sometimes uses in both Japanese- and foreign-language promotional materials for Asakusa Jinta.
years while maintaining a strong interest in music. He especially liked American oldies, in particular the rockabilly music produced by the Memphis label Sun Records, which he visited in the mid-1980s. The trip was transformative, causing him to realize that he lacked a historical and cultural connection to rockabilly that he felt American musicians possessed. It made him confront Japanese tendencies of copying foreign trends rather than fostering and appreciating native ways. In this context, he became inspired by musicians around the world, such as the French/Spanish/Portuguese group Mano Negra, who combined their own native “ethnic” (minzoku) musics with rock music elements. Aspiring to create a new and original Japanese musical contribution to the global music scene, he listened to all kinds of “world music” marketed in Tokyo, searching for sounds that he could use to individualize his own band. In 1996 he formed the band Death March Fleet (Desu Māchi

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2 Other music and musicians Oshow has mentioned as influences are Punjabi bhangra (a mix of Punjabi traditional music with Western popular styles), and groups such as Balkan Beat Box (an Israeli ensemble that incorporates Jewish, Eastern European, and Middle Eastern traditions with gypsy punk [a cross between Romani music and punk rock] and electronica), Fanfare Ciocărlia (a Romani brass band from Romania who describe their music as “Balkan funk”), and Zabranjeno Pušenje (a Bosnian band with a garage rock sound with Bosnian folk music influences).

3 As Philip Bohlman makes clear, the term “world music” is practically impossible to define [Philip V. Bohlman, World Music: A Very Short Introduction (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)]. In our conversations, Oshow at times used the term to refer to the foreign non-pop styles marketed in Japan under that designation (as in the “world music” section of a record store). However, he also used the term to refer to music that blends traditions from around the world and reaches global audiences (see, for instance, the definition of “world fusion” at http://www.last.fm/tag/world+fusion/wiki). Namely, Oshow expressed excitement at the memory of the moment he felt that Asakusa Jinta was “becoming real world music” (hontō no wārudo myūjikku ni natte iru) when it began to get attention internationally. This usage may seem strange to English-speaking Western readers to whom the variously defined term “world music” has been used to refer not only to Westernized hybrids of traditional or folk musics from around the world, but almost always including traditional, neotraditional, and various other hybridized music styles of non-Western communities—namely, “world music” is the music of the Other. The notion that a Japanese pop/rock band could “become real world music” is, in this definition, nonsensical. In Japan, although pop/rock music of the English-speaking West is technically “the music of the Other,” it would never be referred to as “world music” since it has the hegemonic position on the political-economic-musical stage to define itself as the global musical standard. At the same time, Japanese traditional and folk styles are normally not considered to be “world music” since, for the Japanese, they are also not “the music of the Other.” Although in Japan the definition of “world music” is also not consistent, there is the notion that music made by Japanese people can be “world music” if it participates in the kind of glocalization that Oshow and Asakusa Jinta strive for. For instance, the Japanese Digital Daijisen defines “world music” as “music from around the world, particularly popular music in cities that erases notions of genre (toshi ni okeru datsu-janru-teki na popyurā ongaku no
Kantai), which included trumpet and combined sounds from Japanese military songs (gunka) and psychobilly (a fusion genre that includes sounds from punk, rock, rockabilly, and rhythm and blues). That same year, he ended his art teaching career to pursue his music full time, developing his sound and image over the next decade.

At one point, Oshow had strongly considered basing his band in New York City in order to access the much larger American popular music market. He soon realized, however, that his objective of creating a markedly “Japanese” sound would be much less meaningful in New York City than in a place like Asakusa that is “right in the heart of Japan,” and which had yet to brand its own young and original music. By 2000, he definitively chose Asakusa as the base for his group, which was at that time called Hyakkai no Gyōretsu. In 2004, after collaborating with the Rakugo Arts Association (Rakugo Geijutsu), the group changed their name to Asakusa Jinta and began to strategically blend the global and the local in their musical performances.4

With Asakusa Jinta, Oshow has worked to produce a “glocal” Asakusa music—a musical sound that is at once very distinctly local and of Asakusa, but also engaged in the global music scene.5 As he explained:

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4 The band performed at the celebration for the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Rakugo Fine Arts Association, and an album commemorating that event was released the following year [Rakugo Geijutsu Kyōkai and Asakusa Jinta, Gei-Kyō-On-Dzukushi: Rakugo Geijutsu Kyōkai Sōritsu 75-Shūnenkinen (Tokyo: Teichiku Records, 2005)]. Rakugo artist Sanyūtei Koyūza (1947-) gave the band its current name during that collaboration.

5 Oshow specifically used the term “glocal” to refer to the conscious mixing of his local native Japanese ideas and sounds with the internationally created and globally popular styles in the music of Asakusa Jinta. He mistakenly credited the Japanese music magazine writer and editor Ōishi Hajime with coining the term in his 2011 book Glocal Beats. Commenting on music similar to that of Asakusa Jinta’s, that book specifically profiles artists who identify with certain localities around the world, but whose club and electronic music has penetrated the global market since the 1990s [Hajime Ōishi and Shūjun Yoshimoto, eds., GLOCAL BEATS]
It’s like selling locally produced sake around the world, or circulating it internationally. I think if you spread something that local people make, support, or respect around the world, it has all kinds of secondary effects. In that respect, we’re like a kind of locally produced sake.6

A genre-blending ensemble, Asakusa Jinta currently consists of a trumpet, euphonium or tuba, electric guitar, double bass, drums, and vocals, and in the past has also included an accordion, a trombone, and saxophones. In their glocalizing efforts, Oshow and his fellow band members consciously mix sounds from punk, ska, rockabilly, Tex-Mex, swing, klezmer, “gypsy music,” polka, waltz, and military marches, in addition to Japanese kayōkyoku and enka. Asakusa Jinta calls itself an “Asianican Hard Marching Band,” and they do indeed periodically perform while “marching” through the neighborhood’s streets, making an


(Tokyo: Ongaku Shuppan-sha, 2011]). In reality, the term “glocal” has been in use since the 1980s, and it is employed to discuss the simultaneous presence of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies, a concept with increasing relevance in the contemporary world of technologically mediated, high-speed communication and trade, and with clear relevance to Oshow’s objectives for Asakusa Jinta.

unmistakable visual and sonic reference to Asakusa’s traditional chindon-ya and other similar bands from a century ago (see Video 15). Oshow pedals an old-fashioned bicycle with an electronic sound system mounted in its sidecar, a microphone held in one hand. The rest of the band troops along, while pedestrians and tourists stop to listen and clap along to their music. More often, however, the band appears on stages in performance venues large and small throughout Tokyo, around Japan, and around the world.

For Oshow, the name Asakusa Jinta is intimately tied to the group’s glocal aims, and is grounded in the late-modern roman, traditional, and Shitamachi memories that contemporary Asakusa evokes. As he explained, the band is named for a type of musical ensemble common in Japan in the early twentieth century:

[As for the term ‘jinta,’ we] wanted a name that made it easy for people to understand that we are a small band that includes wind instruments. But [we] also wanted to pick a name that is representative of things that are local, and representative of Asakusa. [We] wanted a name that would make it easy for people to understand that [we/our music] is from Asakusa, even on a global scale.

Indeed, jinta were a form of small civilian brass band that became widely popular in the late Meiji period, who could be hired to parade the streets displaying store or product names, or to entertain audiences at circuses and festivals. Ubiquitous on the streets of Japan for only a few years (replaced by chindon-ya in the late 1910s and early 1920s), jinta indigenized the sounds of European brass bands into a distinctly glocal sound of 1900s-Japan. On one hand, they created a distinctive sound that omitted harmony and

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7 Oshow explained that the word “Asianican” came from a brainstorming session among members of an earlier band while trying to come up with a name for their new album. All agreeing that “anything’s fine (ee ja nee ka),” they then played around with the sound of that statement, “ee ja nee ka,” and it became “Asianican,” also referencing their larger Asian geographical context.

disregarded the orderliness that Western military ensembles espoused in favor of a more flexible and Japanese sense of intonation, timbre, rhythm, and volume. On the other hand, jinta also popularized Western music in Japan before recorded music was widely circulated. Oshow explained that his band aims to do something similar to what those jinta of old did, mixing native and international styles in order to reach wide audiences:

In the early Shōwa and Taishō periods, jinta played a big role. They were like DJs. They were trying to introduce all kinds of different music from around the world, and make it easier for Japanese people to get to know those musics... What would it be like if we did something like what jinta were doing those days, but in a contemporary situation? That’s what I want to do with this band. With that kind of history, I wanted to take that old-fashioned concept and make it with a contemporary sound...

[Asakusa Jinta’s] music has Japanese melodies, using pentatonic scales. And I also include klezmer as well. Gagaku, for instance, uses a pentatonic scale similar to klezmer... So by borrowing sounds from klezmer, I can have a melody that is familiar to Japanese people... The [original] jinta style was to use marches, waltzes, and polkas. Asakusa Jinta also plays Japanese melodies in those styles, using lyrics that resonate with people of today, and with the soul of Asakusa.

Some historical and musical inaccuracies in his comments aside (see footnote 10), in many ways, Oshow has very much succeeded in his aims to produce a glocal Asakusa music—one that both resonates with the local people, and excites audiences around the globe. Since the formation of Asakusa Jinta, the group has released seven full-length

9 Hosokawa refers to the Japanized approach to the European military music audible in early-twentieth-century jinta performances as “accidental heterophony,” wherein the players produced “a musical texture in which variations of a single melody are simultaneously sounded, not as a composed structure but as an unintended consequence of multiple players performing with individual variations intact” (Abe, “Resonances of Chindon-Ya: Sound, Space, and Social Difference in Contemporary Japan,” 36, citing Shūhei Hosokawa, “Chindonya,” Unpublished Manuscript, 6).

10 Oshow stated that jinta were performing in the Taishō and early Shōwa periods. Scholars agree, however, that they were only prominent in the earliest years of the twentieth century, i.e. the late Meiji period (Hosokawa, “Shōnen Ongakutai: Seiyō Ongaku No Nihonka, Taishūka 11”). Oshow also claimed that there are significant similarities between the traditional Japanese scales and klezmer scales, namely a common pentatonicism. However, klezmer scholarship does not support this claim at all, and instead states that klezmer modes are essentially heptatonic—in fact, they often have more than seven pitches per octave due to the existence of variable tones, i.e. certain pitches which may vary depending upon melodic conventions [Joel Edward Rubin, “The Art of Klezmer: Improvisation and Ornamentation in the Commercial Recordings of New York Clarinetists Naftule Brandwein and Dave Tarras 1922-1929” (City University, London, 2001), 106–107]. Some similarities that do exist between traditional Japanese modes and
albums, in addition to five shorter “rapid-fire release” (*renpatsu riritsu*) albums, and has contributed to a number of *anime* (animated cartoon) soundtracks. These have comprised mainly original songs, but also some interpretations of well-known folk and early Japanese popular songs (including *ryūkōka* and *kayōkyoku*). Their sound has been described as “a frenetic and festivalistic groove (*matsuri wo kanjiru nekkyō-tekni na gurūbu*),” and they play in “retro” costumes of colorful hats and suits, mixing their “insane jamboree of styles.”\(^{11}\) In addition to performing regularly on the streets of Asakusa, Asakusa Jinta performs throughout Tokyo and around Japan, including at the Fuji Rock Festival in 2009 and 2013. They have also toured in the United States and Europe, performing at the Netherlands’ Lowlands Festival (2008), Finland’s Helsinki Festival, Sweden’s Kulturfestival, England’s Glastonbury Festival (2013), and the USA’s South by Southwest (2007 and 2009).\(^{12}\)

Asakusa Jinta stretches Asakusa’s soundscape montage past the bounds of the neighborhood, throughout Japan, and beyond.

Analysis

Oshow and Asakusa Jinta create their glocal Asakusa music by not only mixing many Japanese and international genres, but also by referencing Asakusa’s sites and cultural tropes in their music, and in various aspects of its public image and activities. As a commercial band performing live for audiences and recording and selling albums, for

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instance, their work is inherently entertainment. Their “retro” name, instrumentation, costumes, and a number of their stylistic-samplings clearly participate in late-modern roman, while Oshow’s emphasis on the band’s support from their local Asakusa community resonates with notions of Shitamachi. Their logo (Image 121) uses the same traditional and spiritual imagery as that of the Asakusa Tourism Federation (Image 56, described in detail on pages 109-112). In their promotional materials on social media, the band’s music is described as engaging in the spirit of “traditional Japanese emotions” such as giri and ninjô. They regularly perform at promotional events in the neighborhood that place them in the matrix of Asakusa’s tourism activities. Finally, deliberately or not, Oshow’s stage name not only designates him as the confident leader, but also as a chief Buddhist priest overseeing his congregation.

Image 121. Asakusa Jinta’s logo. Although the band typically spells “jinta” in katakana, its logo reads “jinta” in Chinese characters, drawing on more traditional associations.

13 Giri refers to certain social obligations, particularly the observance of reciprocal relationships, such as the duty “to help those who have helped you, to do favors for those from whom you have received favors, and so forth. The concept implies a moral force that compels members of a society to engage in reciprocal activities even when their natural inclination (ninjô, [literally ‘human feeling’]) may be to do otherwise... Generally, human feelings do not conflict with with social norms, and observance of giri does not contradict with ninjô. However, conflicts sometimes do arise between social obligation and natural inclination. Though giri and ninjô as terms have outmoded connotations in modern Japan, the concepts are still important in guiding conduct” [Japan Illustrated Encyclopedia, Keys to the Japanese Heart and Soul (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd, 1999), 88–89].
One unmistakable musical manifestation of Oshow’s glocalism is the band’s rendition of “Asakusa Ondo.” The song was written in 2005 by composer Seshi Bonta and lyricist Shōji Ryō on commission from the Western Asakusa Shopping District Council (Nishi-chiku Shōten-gai Kyōgi-kai). Not originally intended for Asakusa Jinta, it was first performed by kayōkyoku and enka singers Yamanaka Akemi and Kubota Kenji, accompanied by a group of dancers, at a special publicity event in that shopping district. The composer and lyricist later commissioned Asakusa Jinta to perform their version of the song, which they premiered in August of that same year at an event celebrating the opening of the new Tsukuba Express train station in Asakusa. That parade-style live performance also provided the opportunity to promote the release of their second album (Asakusa Ondo, 2005), which included their studio recording of the song.

“Asakusa Ondo” is a distinctive piece in Asakusa Jinta’s repertoire. It is neither an original song written by Oshow and the band, nor is it an interpretation of an older Japanese folk or popular song. It is instead an arrangement of a recently written shin min-yō...
(new folk song). The “ondo” of the song’s title is a general term applied throughout Japan to folk songs led by a soloist, and accompanying group singing and dancing. Because ondo were used to unify the movements of large groups of people, many obon (summer festival) dances also came to be called ondo. In the early Shōwa period, a type of new folk song began to be written whose titles also often included the term. These shin min-yō ondo were/are written to celebrate local communities, and they resemble much older songs to varying degrees, but sometimes contain Western musical elements as well. Their lyrics are typically comprised of lines of text to be sung by a soloist, and lines of kakegoe to be sung by the group. These new local ondo are also commonly used for obon dances, and to unite local residents in an act of communal performance.

“Tōkyō Ondo” (1932) is a classic example of this phenomenon. That early shin min-yō has a jaunty traditional pentatonic melody, which, in its most commonly played contemporary recording (Video 16), is accompanied by a fluid violin countermelody. As a

14 The term “ondo” means “leader” or “lead,” and so group songs led by a solo leader came to be designated in this way.

15 Obon is a festival held each summer (the 13th to the 15th day of the seventh month of the lunar calendar, mid-August) to commemorate one’s ancestors. Among other customs, communal folk dances called bon odori (obon dance) are performed during this period in public areas like parks, gardens, or open squares.

16 Such new ondo often combine Japanese traditional and/or folk musical modes, instrumentation, lyrical material, or choreography with Western musical elements, such as orchestral instrumentation or polyphony. This is a case of musical wayō-sechū (Japanese-Western blending), as I also described in: “Being Musically ‘Japanese-Western’: Wayō-Sechū Musical Consciousness in Contemporary Traditional Japanese Koto Music” (Master’s Thesis, University of Michigan, 2009).


18 The pentatonic melodies used in “Tōkyō Ondo” are built upon Koizumi’s miyakobushi tetrachord, that is, the tetrachord most often heard in urban melodies, including folk melodies of urban origin (Koizumi, “Musical Scales in Japanese Music,” 74-75). Given the song’s inherent association with Japan’s largest city, this is an unsurprising compositional choice. “Tōkyō Ondo” and its dance can be seen and heard at https://youtu.be/MubKdKR95q0. A graphic of the miyakobushi scale heard in “Tōkyō Ondo” can be seen in the footnote on the following page.
special “local song” (otōchi songu), its lyrics reference various names of places throughout the city, such as Musashino, Ueno, Ginza, and the Sumida River. While those words are sung by a solo leader, the community participants contribute by singing or calling out set kakegoe common in new ondo (“yoi yoi,” for instance). “Tōkyō Ondo” was first performed at the obon festival in Hibiya Park in Tokyo in 1932, and remains popular at similar festivals in the Tokyo area today.

Likewise, as a more recently composed shin min-yō, “Asakusa Ondo” calls to mind older Japanese songs with pentatonic melodies. Unlike “Tōkyō Ondo,” however, its modality is not purely traditional, and instead draws upon the Western-Japanese syncretic yonanuki scale (see the original score of “Asakusa Ondo” in Example 9 in the Appendix). The yonanuki is a pentatonic scale created by dropping scale degrees four and seven from the Western major scale (“yonanuki” literally means “without four and seven”). This scale was adopted in Japan during the Meiji period, when it was especially prevalent in elementary school songs, to help bridge the gap between native Japanese musical sounds and Western music that the Japanese government wished to cultivate among the people at that time. The original orchestration also involved musical syncretism, as it included a

The miyakobushi scale heard in “Tōkyō Ondo”:

19 See the lyrics of “Tōkyō Ondo” at http://www.mahoroba.ne.jp/~gonbe007/hog/shouka/tokyoondo.html.
20 According to writer Nagai Kafū, at the “Tōkyō Ondo” premier event in Hibiya Park, people were required to purchase a yukata at the sponsoring department store before being allowed to participate in the ondo song and dance [Kafū Nagai, Bokutō Kitan, (Iwanami Shonten, Tokyo: 1947), 168]. With their connections with obon festivals, ondo are associated with the summertime, and are often used as the main title song in anime (animated cartoons) during the summer season. Also drawing on the songs’ associations with summertime, “Tōkyō Ondo” is sung as the fight song for the Yakult Swallows, one of the city’s professional baseball teams.
recorded jazz band with a solo electric guitar, and an opening percussion line featuring Japanese festival *taiko* (see Video 17). Its harmonies—an element stemming from Western music in general—are made up of straightforward chord progressions common in much Euro-American-influenced popular music around the world.\textsuperscript{22}

Like the lyrics of new *ondo* broadly, those of “Asakusa Ondo” (see Figure 10 on page 313) refer to various aspects of the celebrated locale. In the case of “Asakusa Ondo,” the lyrics are a potpourri of the neighborhood’s famous sights, sounds, people, and features, both historical and contemporary. Sung by a soloist, each of the song’s four verses begins with a line calling to mind one of the four seasons in Asakusa, and proceeds to depict the multifarious neighborhood by enumerating its special characteristics in a stream-of-consciousness fashion. The last line in each verse is preceded by a line of *kakegoe* to be sung by the community participants, in this case, “soiya,” repeated four times. After the soloist leads us through Asakusa’s four seasons and the hodgepodge of its cultural history, they announce the ringing of the New Year’s bell (presumably the temple bell on Benten Yama) out to the world.

When Asakusa Jinta created their rendition of “Asakusa Ondo,” they kept the lyrics almost just as Shōji wrote them, but they changed the melody and harmonies of the song

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considerably (see Examples 9 and 10 in the Appendix for the musical transcriptions, Figure 11 in the Appendix for a table detailing the sounds heard in each section of the song, and Video 18 to hear a recording). Like their other repertoire in general, their version of “Asakusa Ondo” draws on a mixture of styles, and their changes to the song are evidence of various musical influences. The harmonies maintain the same harmonic functions as those in the original, although the specific chords differ, showing greater complexity and influence from jazz. The melody loses its pentatonicism and much of its breadth of contour, gaining scale-degree seven and becoming more rhythmically driven. It also gains a loose swing common in popular styles that have significant jazz influence. In Asakusa Jinta’s “Asakusa Ondo,” that rhythm is especially prominent in the pre-choruses, and in the verses where it mirrors the rhythm of the Japanese festival kane, heard playing a long-short-long-short rhythm in the accompaniment. The general tempo of the song is essentially doubled from the original so that the pace in the verses and pre-chorus is comparable to Sanja Matsuri’s matsuri-bayashi music, resulting in the kane playing at an idiomatic speed. However, the note values are doubled in the chorus, rendering the actual rate of that music similar to that in the original, creating a strong contrast to the verse and pre-chorus, and further marking that section as climactic and different.

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23 The only changes to the lyrics made by the band were to add two lines of spoken words after the third chorus (lines 25 and 26), to omit the line of “soiya, soiya, soiya” in the fourth chorus (which would have fallen after line 32), and adding chants of “soiya” in the introductory and concluding lines (not included in the lyrical transcription).

24 In terms of similar harmonic functions between the original version and Asakusa Jinta’s rendition, for instance, both involve general movement from tonic to dominant and back again over the course of the verse. However, with its ii\(\text{add}^9\) in measure six rather than a tonic chord, for example, Asakusa Jinta’s harmonies show greater complexity and influence from jazz.
The other portions of the track—its introduction, the brass-dominated tattoo, and the two bridges—show an even greater range of stylistic sampling.25 The opening moments, for example, seem to take inspiration from American doo-wop music with its I-iv-ii-V chord progressions. The tattoos, dominated by brass, show considerable similarity to Balkan brass band styles (likely the “gypsy music” that Oshow mentions as one of the band’s major influences) with their up-tempo march beat, spirited trumpet and saxophone melodies, prominent euphonium inner voice, and contrapuntal texture. There are sounds from jazz (the walking bass under the brass band passages, the swing rhythms in the drums), from klezmer (the falling brass line at 0:29 in Video 18, the accordion flourishes in the second bridge), from 1950s R&B (the style of the backup singers in each chorus), and from rock and roll (the distorted electric guitar). Furthermore, the accordion is standard instrumentation in ryūkōka, and its inclusion as harmonic support throughout harkens back to that older Japanese popular style. Asakusa Jinta’s arrangement of the song also roots its glocal sound very specifically in Asakusa with quotations from matsuri-bayashi music heard in a whirling flute melody in the opening moments of the song, in addition to the kane in each verse. Oshow’s vocal style at times sounds a bit like mid-century lounge music, while at other times calls to mind a carnival barker, giving the track as a whole a nostalgic yet vibrant and dramatic energy.

The lyrics, however, are the element that most strongly ground the song in the neighborhood. Like the original, the Asakusa Jinta arrangement contains a line in each chorus of the kakegoe “soiya,” chanted by a group, aligning it with ondo in general, and

25 A tattoo is a formal device found in pop-rock music that Walter Everett defines as “a short, one-phrase [instrumental] unit that may reappear as if to bring the song back into focus, perhaps to call extra attention to the following verse or, if the phrase had functioned as the song’s introduction, to make it seem as if we are off to a fresh start” (Everett, The Foundations of Rock, 151).
| Verse 1: | 1. Spring in Asakusa, one thousand cherry trees  
|         | 2. There is also jazz playing [on] the pleasure boats  
| Pre-Chorus 1: | 3. Opera, “Kappore,” “Nonki-bushi”  
|           | 4. Entertainment, dancers, young girls in kimono  
| Chorus 1: | 5. Shitamachi Asakusa, town of the masses  
|          | 6. Hearts are dancing, hearts are dancing  
|          | 7. (soiya, soiya, soiya, soiya)  
|          | 8. The [cherry] blossom of Edo  
| Verse 2: | 9. Summer in Asakusa, one thousand fireworks burst  
|          | 10. Sanja Matsuri’s flutes and drums  
| Pre-Chorus 2: | 11. Samba, morning glories, The Potted Plant Fair  
|           | 12. Goldfish peddlers at The Chinese Lantern Plant Fair  
| Chorus 2: | 13. The world’s Asakusa, foreign visitors also [have]  
|          | 14. Trembling hearts, trembling hearts  
|          | 15. (soiya, soiya, soiya, soiya)  
|          | 16. The emotion of Edo  
| Bridge 2: | 17. Autumn in Asakusa, kabuki superstars  
|          | 18. Danjūrō’s Sensō-ji  
|          | 19. Kabuki, jōruri, nó theater  
|          | 20. Women’s sword theater, nanwa-bushi  
| Chorus 3: | 21. Tokyo’s Asakusa [is] the entertainers’ town  
|          | 22. Geisha, oiran, geisha, oiran  
|          | 23. (soiya, soiya, soiya, soiya)  
|          | 24. The luster of Edo  
|          | 25. (The town of Asakusa has spirit!)  
|          | 26. (The town of Asakusa is the best in the world!)  
| Verse 3: | 27. Winter in Asakusa, Edo’s great urban sprawl  
|          | 28. Is [the sound of that] bell [from] Ueno or Asakusa?  
| Pre-Chorus 2: | 29. Bashō, Hokusai, Hiroshige too  
|           | 30. The great men of Edo [by the] Sumida River  
| Chorus 4: | 31. Japan’s Asakusa, the town of woodblock prints  
|          | 32. Chic and dashing, chic and dashing  
|          | 33. Now [we are really] alive  
| Chorus 5: | 34. If you spend one peaceful year with [me],  
|          | 35. Out to the world, out to the world  
|          | 36. (soiya, soiya, soiya, soiya)  
|          | 37. The New Year’s bell [will ring]  

Figure 10. The English translation of the lyrics of “Asakusa Ondo” as sung by Asakusa Jinta. Lines referencing tropes are labeled with colors. Formal sections are labeled in bold on the left. The Japanese lyrics and a detailed analysis can be found in Figure 12 in the Appendix.
placing it in Asakusa in particular with that Sanja Matsuri mikoshi chant (see pages 288-291 for a discussion of festival kakegoe). Asakusa Jinta’s version also opens with the group chanting the kakegoe over the festival flute and the doo-wop harmonies, and to close out the track over an electric guitar flourish. The rest of the text vividly depicts an Asakusa that is full of music, active markets and fairs, stage performances, visual art, corporeal pleasures, stylishness, sophistication, and excitement. A montage in and of themselves, the lyrics reference each of Asakusa’s six tropes in a mottled miscellany (see the color-coded labeling of the tropes alluded to in each line of the lyrics above, and a detailed analysis of them on in Figure 11 the Appendix). Themes shift constantly, with words and ideas overlapping in their references to the neighborhood’s variegated popular identity. More than simply listing assorted concrete aspects of the neighborhood, however, the lyrics suggest that this mélange that is Asakusa has an incomparable emotional vitality. They collapse time and space as Asakusa exists simultaneously now and yesterday—as it is placed in Shitamachi, in Tokyo, in Japan, and in the world.

III. Conclusion

With their performance of “Asakusa Ondo,” Asakusa Jinta offers a self-contained example of Asakusa’s soundscape montage, invoking all six of the neighborhood’s tropes in a single song. With his priority of creating music that is explicitly of Asakusa, by choosing to cover this shin min-yō in particular, Oshow purposefully engages with the broad popular identity of the neighborhood. However, Asakusa Jinta’s rendition of “Asakusa Ondo,” and their approach to making glocal Asakusa music in general, also provides an illustration of the final facet of my theory of soundscape montage, wherein the ramifications of

26 Asakusa Jinta omit the line of kakegoe in Chorus 4, making the return of the chant in the final chorus all the more climactic.
soundscape overlap can be considered in larger and larger contexts. The analyses in the six preceding case studies mainly took into account soundscape overlap on a relatively constrained geographical and conceptual scale. However, the ideas about soundscapes, agency, montage, and place that I present with this dissertation can be applied on a wider scale, taking into account larger soundscapes and the consequences of their overlappings.

Oshow, with his priorities of creating a music of Asakusa that also participates in the global fusion music scene, is, on the one hand, bringing new sounds and ideas into the neighborhood that musically frame Asakusa as a participant in the contemporary globalizing world. Considered from another perspective, however, he is also engaging with various international musical styles whose soundscapes have come into Japan and resonated in his musikscape, allowing him to feel emplaced and construct a new possibility of emplacement that is simultaneously in Asakusa and in “the world.” In considering how Asakusa’s soundscape overlaps with other larger ones in this way, we can begin to see how the theory of soundscape montage can be applied in a variety of contexts in which contact between smaller soundscapes makes possible progressively larger and larger ones, in an ever-expanding process outward.

Thinking on such larger regional or international scales, I expect that using this theoretical model to examine the contact between, and evolution of, entire musical styles and scenes could open up new ways of thinking about how music, agency, and ideas about place come together. What could be learned, for example, in considering the confluence of sound, place, and agency in the case of Elvis Presley, as the soundscapes of distinct musical styles converged in his environment and at a key moment in his life, and he (and his
producers) wielded them in new and unique ways? How were those factors different for African-American musicians playing in similar styles at the same time?

There are also numerous other areas for future inquiry to test the bounds of this theory. For instance, Asakusa is a place with a very pronounced identity in the public imagination. In other sites that are more culturally generic, this model may be less effective. It may not be possible or necessary to identify broadly relevant cultural tropes in all settings, for instance, even in other dense urban settings. Other factors, such as the demographics of the people involved in a given place, may also necessitate reworking the model in other ways. Although Asakusa is a neighborhood in a large cosmopolitan city, it is also a part of one of the most ethnically and culturally homogeneous countries in the world. Comparatively speaking, people there do not face many of the same issues as those who live in more culturally diverse settings. How does someone fashion a desirable musikscape for themselves in their own home, for instance, when their new neighbor from another part of the world has vastly different ideas about how loudly he can appropriately play music on his home stereo? What would a study of highly diverse neighborhoods in New York City’s Brooklyn or Queens look like with these issues in mind? Applying this model in a setting like Asakusa—relatively stable politically and economically—also does not reveal some of the ways in which individuals’ agency might be constrained in other contexts. What is the experience of sound and place for refugees, for instance, who find themselves quite suddenly in a new and unfamiliar setting? How does the trauma of their refugee experience affect their encounter with their new environment and their ability to process it? And how does their sudden presence in that location affect its soundscape(s) and its previously existing inhabitants?
Indeed, matters of constrained agency can be factors for people in Asakusa too. It is a privilege to have the choice as to which activities and spaces one engages in at a given time and location, and the individuals I chose to profile in the analyses above mostly had that advantage. But how does Asakusa sound for individuals in more limited circumstances, such as the many homeless people who inhabit its streets? What is the nature of their agency to engage with the diverse meanings of Asakusa’s sounds when they must spend significantly more energy and attention just satisfying their basic needs? Furthermore, how might mental illness or other disabilities, such as deafness or blindness, affect how some individuals encounter and perceive the neighborhood’s soundscape and feel emplaced there?

Moreover, in today’s technologically and economically interconnected world, the source of sound and music is not geographically fixed. Not only can sounds be divorced from their sources through recordings, they can travel great distances in mere moments, and can be heard in real time in locations far removed from their sources. In these circumstances, place can become conceptual rather than necessarily physical/geographical. Recording also makes possible the musical combination of sounds from vastly different locations, and with different place-related meanings (i.e. sound sampling in styles related to hip hop). In order to consider such music or sound art in terms of soundscape montage, new notions such as “imaginary places” or “impossible soundscapes” might need to be theorized.

There are many avenues for future research. At its most basic, I offer soundscape montage as a way of understanding how people create and make sense of the multifarious sounds they encounter in dense cities. It is my hope that the ideas presented here might be
usefully tested in and adapted to new and different contexts, contributing meaningfully to the larger conversation about the way in which human beings relate to one another and their world through sound and music.
Appendix
Asakusa Meibutsu

Lyricist: Nobumoto Kyoen
Composer: Kiyomoto Umekichi

Asakusa Ondo
original version

Lyricist: Shōji Ryō
Composer: Seishi Bonta

\[ J = \text{ca. 104} \]

\[ \text{Bb} \]

Verse 1: Ha-ru no A-sa-kusa Se-nbo-nza-ku-ra

\[ \text{Gm7} \]

Jazu mo na-ga-re-ru Ya-ka-ta-bu-ne

\[ \text{Cm7} \]

Chorus 1:

Pre-Chorus 1: O-pe-ra Ka-ppo-re No-nki-bu-shi En-ge-i O-do-ri-ko Fu-ri-so-de-san Shita-

\[ \text{Dm7} \]

ma-chi_ A-sa-kusa Ta-i-shū_ no ma-chi

\[ \text{Gm} \]

Koko-ro o-do-ra-su Koko-ro o-dra-su

\[ \text{Cm7} \]

soiya soiya soiya E-do no ha-na

Example 9. The melody and harmonies, and the lyrics of Verse 1, Pre-Chorus 1, and Chorus 1 of “Asakusa Ondo” as they were written by Seishi Bonta and Shōji Ryō.
Copied from the score received from Shōji himself.
Asakusa Ondo
Arranged by Asakusa Jinta

Lyricist: Shōji Ryū
Composer: Seshi Bonta

\[ j = \text{ca. 200} \]

C loose, jazzy feel

\[ \text{Verse 1: Ha-ru no Asa-kusa Sen-bon_za-kura} \]

\[ \text{Ja-zu mo na-ga-re-ru_ Ya-ka-ta-bu-ne} \]


Chorus 1: Shi-ta-ma-chi Asa-kusa

Example 10. The melody and harmonies, and the lyrics of Verse 1, Pre-Chorus 1, and Chorus 1 of “Asakusa Ondo” as they were arranged by Asakusa Jinta, transcribed from Video 18 (continued on the following page).
Female back-up:

Kokoro odo rasu

Chanted by crowd:

(soiya soiya soiya soiya) Edo no-(o) ha-(a) na
Figure 11. A detailing of the sounds and musical styles heard in each section of Asakusa Jinta's rendition of "Asakusa Ondo." Time references are from Video 18.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Musical Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Introduction**<br>(0:00-0:11) | - Group chanting "soiya," the *kakegoe* from Sanja Matsuri  
- *Takebue* (bamboo flute) reminiscent of (and perhaps sampled from) *matsuri-bayashi*  
- Doo-wop harmonic progression (I-vi-ii-V, etc.)  
- Brass, saxophone, electric guitar, and drum kit |
| **Tattoo**<br>(0:11-0:21) | - Instrumentation and style of Balkan brass band  
- Rock-style distorted electric guitar  
- Accordion harmonization  
- Drum kit and hand clapping  
- Bass and drum kit throughout the entire track incorporate sounds from rock, jazz, and Western swing |
| **Verse 1**<br>(0:21-0:31) | - Sung melody has relatively limited melodic contour  
- Sung melody includes scale-degree seven, but lacks scale degree four (throughout)  
- Sung melody is rhythmically driven, with significant swing rhythms  
- Harmonies are relatively complex, showing influence from jazz (throughout all sung sections)  
- Rock-style distorted electric guitar  
- Accordion playing harmonies  
- Vibraslap (0:30-0:31; widely used to sound silly and fun)  
- Klezmer-style falling line in brass (0:29-0:31)  
- *Kane* (bell) providing constant swing rhythm, reminiscent of *matsuri-bayashi* |
| **Pre-chorus 1**<br>(0:31-0:35) | - Sung melody is rhythmically driven, with significant swing rhythms  
- Undistorted chorus pedal on electric guitar (pop rather than hard rock sound) |
| **Chorus 1**<br>(0:35-1:01) | - Rock-style distorted electric guitar  
- Accordion playing harmonies  
- Brass and saxophone embellishments  
- 1950s R&B backup singers (0:45-0:55)  
- Sanja Matsuri *kakegoe*  
- Vibraslap (0:59-1:00) |
| **Tattoo**<br>(1:01-1:06) | - Shortened version |
| **Verse 2**<br>(1:06-1:16) | (differences from Verse 1)  
- Accordion melodic embellishment (*klezmer influence*) |
| **Pre-chorus 2**<br>(1:16-1:20) | (similar to Pre-chorus 1) |
| **Chorus 2**<br>(1:20-1:46) | (similar to Chorus 1) |
| **Bridge 1 (instrumental)**<br>(1:46-2:05) | - Brass and saxophone drawing on Balkan brass band style  
- Accordion playing harmonies  
- Whistle, lending an air of fun and frivolity (1:55) |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bridge 2</td>
<td>- Lyrics from verse 3 and pre-chorus 3 of original composition are spoken (in the manner of a carnival barker) rather than sung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2:05-2:15)</td>
<td>- Music functions as a bridge rather than a verse/pre-chorus, i.e. in contrasts the verses and choruses in tonality, instrumentation, vocal style, but nevertheless sets up the retransitional dominant leading back to the chorus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Accordion accompaniment with klezmer-style flourishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorus 3</td>
<td>(differences from Chorus 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2:15-2:45)</td>
<td>- Includes phrase extension with spoken words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Single strike on a woodblock, reminiscent of Sanja Matsuri's <em>hyōshigi</em> (2:45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verse 3</td>
<td>(differences from Verse 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2:45-2:55)</td>
<td>- No vibraslap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-chorus 3</td>
<td>(similar to Pre-chorus 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2:55-2:59)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorus 4</td>
<td>(differences from Chorus 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3:00-3:23)</td>
<td>- <em>kakegoe</em> line is omitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorus 5</td>
<td>(differences from Chorus 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3:23-3:53)</td>
<td>- Wailing saxophone melodic embellishment</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>- Undistorted guitar behind 1950s backup</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <em>kakegoe</em> line is repeated three times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tattoo</td>
<td>(differences from first iteration)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3:53-4:10)</td>
<td>- Distorted electric guitar lick at closing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Concluded with a chanted line of <em>kakegoe</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Japanese Lyric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>Haru no Asakusa</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><em>Jazu no nagareru</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><em>Opera Kappore</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><em>Engel Odoriko</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><em>Shitamachi Asakusa</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><em>Kokoro odorasi</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td><em>(soiya soiya soiya soiya)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td><em>Edo no hana</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td><em>Natsu no Asakusa</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td><em>Sanja Matsuri no</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td><em>Sanba Asagao</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td><em>Hōzuki-Ichi ni</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td><em>Sekai no Asakusa</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td><em>Kokoro furuwasu</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td><em>(soiya soiya soiya soiya)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td><em>Edo no jō</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td><em>Aki no Asakusa</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td><em>Danjurō no</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td><em>Kabuki Jōruri</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td><em>Onna kengeki</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td><em>Tōkyō Asakusa</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td><em>Geisha oiran</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td><em>(soiya soiya soiya soiya)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td><em>Edo no tsuya</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td><em>(Asakusa-ichi wa</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td><em>Kokoroiki yo)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td><em>Fuyu no Asakusa</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td><em>Kane wa Ueno ka</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td><em>Bashō Hokusai</em></td>
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<td>30</td>
<td><em>Edo no mononofu</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td><em>Nihon no Asakusa</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td><em>Iki to inase de</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td><em>Iki to inase de</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td><em>Heiwa na ichinen</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td><em>Kurashite kure to</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td><em>(soiya soiya soiya soiya)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td><em>Joye no kane</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 12.** The lyrics of “Asakusa Ondo” as sung by Asakusa Jinta in Japanese (left) and their English translation (right). Lines referencing the neighborhood’s tropes are labeled with colors.
Details of lyrics from Figure 12.

Line 1
- “One thousand cherry trees,” traditional.
  Sakura (cherry trees) grow in abundance in Sumida Park, on the bank of the Sumida River in the Asakusa area. There are also a number in the yard of the Sensō-ji Kindergarten, which border the north end of Nakamise Street on the western side. Sakura are in bloom for about a week, typically in early spring in Tokyo, depending on weather conditions. The blooming period of sakura is one of celebration throughout Japan, as people gather for hanami (flower-viewing parties) under the gauzy pink branches to appreciate the short-lived beauty of the blossoms. The practice of hanami under sakura trees dates to at least the Heian period, and cherry blossoms have also held symbolic value in Japan for centuries.¹

Line 2
- “There is also jazz playing,” entertainment and late-modern roman.
  See Chapter 6 for details on jazz and its relationship to the late-modern roman trope.
- “On the pleasure boats,” entertainment and tradition.
  Yakatabune (pleasure boats) are believed to have their roots among aristocrats in the 8th and 9th century, but they reached the height of their popularity in the Edo period. At that time, high-ranked samurai and wealthy merchants kept luxury boats on which to cruise the Sumida River. Today, simpler boats of similar traditional design—with an upward protruding bow, paper lanterns under the roofs, tatami-matted floors—are used for dinner tours on the river.

Line 3
- “Opera,” entertainment and late-modern roman.
  Asakusa's famous operas were performed only from 1917 until 1923, when the Great Kanto Earthquake destroyed their theaters. As Ken Ito explains, Asakusa's “operas” widened the translation of the term, approaching musical comedy and vaudeville in their coarse, decadent, and exoticizing approach to European classical repertoire, appealing to the mass audiences.²
- “Kappore,” entertainment and tradition.
  The name “Kappore” is used in relation to various songs/dances. In her translation of Kawabata Yasunari’s novel, The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa, Alison Freedman defines kappore as a ”Japanese folk dance, ususally accompanied by shamisen, first performed at shrines. There are many kinds of local kappore, and the dance has also been incorporated into kabuki.”³
- “Nonki-bushi,” entertainment and late-modern roman.
  An early enka song written by Soeda Azembo (music) and Ishida Ichimatsu (lyrics) and recorded by Ishida in 1918. Soeda (1872-1944), also a singer and street performer, spent considerable time in Asakusa, and published an essay about the

neighborhood in 1930 entitled *Asakusa Teiryūki* (Record of the Undercurrents of Asakusa).  

Line 4  
- “Entertainment, dancers,” entertainment.  
- “Young girls in kimono,” traditional.  
  The Japanese lyric, “furisode-san,” literally means “person in a long-sleeved kimono.” Long-sleeved kimono are typically worn by unmarried women, and are today, for instance, often worn by young women when celebrating their Coming of Age Day the year that they turn 20.

Line 5  
- “Shitamachi,” Shitamachi.  
- “Town of the masses,” Shitamachi and traditional.  
  During the Edo period, Shitamachi was home to the feudal commoners.

Line 7  
- “Soiya,” spiritual, traditional, and Shitamachi.  
  “Soiya” is the *kakegoe* associated with the Sanja Matsuri *mikoshi* processions in Asakusa (see Chapter 6). The religious and communal (Shitamachi) festival is believed to have a 700-year-old history, and many of its contemporary practices date from the Edo period (traditional).

Line 8  
  A reference to Tokyo’s previous name, and use of the cherry blossom to symbolize Asakusa (see Line 1 above).

Line 9  
- “One thousand fireworks burst,” entertainment and traditional.  
  The Sumida River Fireworks Festival has been held since the 18th century, and has taken place on the portion of the river adjacent to Asakusa since 1978. The event draws one million spectators to the area annually in recent years.

Line 10  
- “Sanja Matsuri’s flutes and drums,” spiritual, Shitamachi, traditional, and entertainment.  
  See line 7 above for an explanation of the tropes associated with Sanja Matsuri. Entertainment has been included on “flutes and drums” because the *matsuri-bayashi* music in which those instruments play is sometimes performed on stage as an official performance, and the music in general is played to add a fun and celebratory air to the event.

Line 11  
- “Samba,” entertainment.  
  The Asakusa Samba Carnival involves a parade through the neighborhood’s streets of dozens of samba dance teams from Brazil and around Japan.  
  “Morning glories,” traditional.  
  A morning glory festival (*asagao-matsuri*) is held from July 6 to 8 each year in Iriya, an area north of Kototoi Street and six to twelve blocks west of Kokusai Street. The

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festival is the largest festival in Japan dedicated to morning glories, and is said to date from the late Edo period.

- "The Potted-Plant Fair," spiritual and traditional.
The Potted-Plant Fair (Ueki-Ichi) is held alongside the festival at the Shinto Sengen Shrine in Asakusa each year on the last weekend of May and the last weekend of June, and thus the fair has become synonymous with the religious festival. The shrine is said to have been built in the Genroku era (1688-1703), and festivals there in late May and Early June date to the Edo period. The Potted-Plant Fair has been held there since the Meiji period. The Meiji roots of the event are not an obvious factor in how it is carried out today, however, and it is treated more as vaguely traditional.

Line 12
- "Goldfish peddlers," traditional and entertainment.
In the Edo period, goldfish peddlers became a common sight and sound in the summer as they hawked their wares with a distinctive call. The goldfish they sold were popular as pets, and it was said that looking at them in the summertime helped relieve discomfort from hot weather. In the mid-18th century in particular, there were a large number of goldfish specialty shops in Asakusa. Today, during festivals in Asakusa, among the many food and game stalls that assemble in Sensō-ji’s precinct, there are stalls offering small children the chance to play a goldfish game and live fish are given as prizes.

Chinese lantern plants (hōzuki, physalis) have distinctive bright reddish-orange papery husks that enclose each growing fruit. Since the Edo period, The Chinese Lantern Plant Fair has been held in the precinct of Sensō-ji on July 9 and 10, when dozens of booths are set up in the open square to sell the plants and tinkling wind chimes. July 10, the second day of the fair, coincides with the holy day Shiman-Rokusen-Nichi (46,000 Day). It is believed that if one visits Sensō-ji to pray on that holy day, it is equivalent to visiting on 46,000 ordinary days.

Line 13
- "Foreign visitors also [have]," tourism.

Line 15
- "Soiya," spiritual, traditional, and Shitamachi.
See Line 7 above.

Line 16
In the Edo period, senryōyaku-sha is a word that was used to refer to kabuki actors who garnered great popularity and fascination from the city’s people. The term literally means “a 1,000-ryō actor,” or an actor who earns the impressive sum of more than 1,000 ryō (Edo-period currency) in one year, although it was used to describe prestigious and popular actors regardless of their income. It is generally
believed that the first actor to earn the yearly salary of 1,000 ryō was Ichikawa Danjûrô II (1688-1758) (see Line 17).7

Line 17
- "Danjûrô," traditional, entertainment.
  Ichikawa Danjûrô is the stage name that has been taken on by a series of kabuki actors of the Ichikawa family. Kabuki actors typically have several stage names over the course of their careers, and being named Ichikawa Danjûrô is an exceptional honor as it is a famous name held by particularly talented and important actors, and so the name is generally taken at the peak of an actor's career. The first Ichikawa Danjûrô lived from 1660 to 1704. The most recent Ichikawa Danjûrô, the twelfth, was born in 1946 and held the name from 1985 until his death in 2013. There is a bronze statue of Danjûrô IX (1838-1903) in Asakusa at the far northern end of Sensô-ji's precinct. Danjûrô IX was a star during the Meiji period, and he is often credited with maintaining the popularity of the traditional kabuki as Japanese society went through the turbulent processes of modernization and Westernization in the late 19th century.
- "Sensô-ji," spiritual.

Line 19
- "Jôruri," entertainment and traditional.
  Jôruri is a type of chanted recitative, originally chanted to the accompaniment of the biwa (a four-stringed, short-necked lute), but it has also been accompanied by the shamisen since the 16th century. Puppets also began to be used to dramatize the chant in the late 16th century. This tradition of puppet theater with narrative music is known as bunraku.
- "Nô theater," entertainment and traditional.
  Nô is a classical musical drama that was first performed in the 14th century.

Line 20
- "Women's sword theater," entertainment, traditional, and late-modern roman.
  Women's sword theater (onna kengeki) was a form of stage drama, derived from an earlier male version simply called "sword theater" (kengeki), in which female actors performed in sword fights. In onna kengeki, the women appeared as women wielding swords, or as dressed as men, but in all cases they fought and defeated male enemies. A type of taishû engeki, onna kengeki was performed in Asakusa at the Mokubakan. This type of stage drama enjoyed a wide popularity in the 1930s, but it is rarely performed today.8
- "Naniwa-bushi," entertainment and late-modern roman.
  Naniwa-bushi is a genre that combines speech and song, accompanied by shamisen. It enjoyed a huge popularity in the early decades of the 20th century, and dominated the Japanese recorded music market in that industry's early years.9

7 https://kotobank.jp/word/%E5%8D%83%E4%B8%A1%E5%BD%B9%E8%80%85-551511, accessed 13 September 2015.
Line 21
- “the entertainers’ town,” entertainment.

Line 22
- “Geisha, oiran,” entertainment and traditional.
  In the Edo period, geisha and oiran were categories of performers associated with the licensed pleasure quarters, such as Edo’s Yoshiwara. Oiran, exclusively female, were Yoshiwara’s high-class prostitutes, who were also educated in a range of skills, including many of the traditional fine arts and musics. Geisha were also trained entertainers, but unlike the oiran, they were not professionally defined by their sexual availability, and in the Edo period, there were male and female geisha alike. There are no longer oiran in Japan today; they dwindled in popularity after their prime in the early Edo period, and prostitution was outlawed in Japan in 1958. As described in Chapter 4, however, there are a small number of geisha (mainly women) who continue to practice and perform traditional Japanese music and dance today.

Line 23
- “Soiya,” spiritual, traditional, and Shitamachi.
  See Line 7 above.

Line 24
- “The luster of Edo,” traditional.

Line 27
- “Edo’s great urban sprawl,” traditional.
  The literal meaning of the lyric is “808 towns,” which is a phrase used to refer to the expansiveness of Edo and its many constituent towns/neighborhoods.

Line 28
- “Is [the sound of that] bell [from] Ueno or Asakusa?” spirituality and Shitamachi.
  While the Tokugawa shogunate initially chose Sensō-ji to be its family prayer hall in Edo, that designation shifted to the Buddhist temple, Kan-ei-ji, in the nearby neighborhood of Ueno in 1625. Today, the bell at Sensō-ji is normally only rung at six o’clock each morning as the temple is opened for the day, but the bell at Kan-ei-ji is rung at six a.m., noon, and six p.m. each day. During the Edo period, temple bells were usually rung on the hour to signal the time to people in the vicinity. This line of lyric is, in fact, a quotation from a haiku by Bashō Matsuo (see Line 29), written in 1694. In the haiku, the poet, amid a cloud of cherry blossoms, hears a bell and ponders its source. He was, presumably, situated somewhere near the two iconic Shitamachi neighborhoods.

Line 29
- “Bashō, Hokusai, Hiroshige too,” traditional.
  Bashō Matsuo (1644-1694) was the most famous poet of Edo-period Japan, recognized the world over as a master of haiku. Although he was born in Iga Province (in present-day Mie Prefecture), he lived in Edo for much of his adult life.

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and Asakusa was featured in a number of his poems, like the one quoted above in Line 28.

Hokusai Katsushika (1760-1849) was ukiyo-e painter and woodblock printmaker who was born, lived, and died in Edo. He is perhaps best known for his woodblock print series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*. Landmarks in Asakusa were sometimes featured in his artwork, such as Hongan-ji (in his *Tōto Asakusa Hongan-ji*, one of the *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*), Kaminarimon (in his *Asakusa Kinryū-zan Raijinmon no Zu*), and other buildings of Sensō-ji’s larger temple complex (in his *Kinryū-zan Niōmon no Zu*).

Hiroshige Utagawa (1797-1858) was another ukiyo-e artist who was born, lived, and died in Edo. Perhaps best known for his *Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō* series, he also began and contributed significantly to the series *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo* (the series was completed by his student after Hiroshige’s death).

Asakusa is visible or is featured in eleven of its paintings.

Line 30
- “[by the] Sumida River,” Shitamachi.
  As explained in Chapter 3, the Sumida River is strongly associated with the Shitamachi life that surrounds it.

Line 31
- “The town of woodblock prints,” traditional.
  The Japanese word used here, ukiyo-e, literally means “pictures of the floating world,” although it is typically translated simply to “woodblock prints” in English. Specifically, ukiyo-e is a genre of woodblock prints that flourished in Japan during the Edo period. The “floating world” referenced in the genre’s title is the hedonistic exploits (visits to Asakusa’s Yoshiwara and kabuki theaters, for instance) of Edo-period commoners that were very often the subject matter for these artworks.11

Line 32
- “Chic and dashing,” traditional and Shitamachi.
  The Japanese words of this lyric, “iki” and “inase,” are strongly associated with the merchants/commoners of Edo. *Iki* is a very nuanced aesthetic ideal, expressing a certain simplicity, sophistication, spontaneity, and originality. I have, therefore, translated it here as “chic.” And, as philosopher Kuki Shūzō explained in his 1930 essay, “to personify *iki*, one must possess an inviolable dignity and grace, commonly expressed in words such as *inase* ‘dashing, spirited,’ *isami* ‘chivalry,’ and *denpō* ‘show-off bravado.’”12

Line 36
- “Soiya,” spiritual, traditional, and Shitamachi.
  See Line 7 above.

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“The New Year’s Bell [will ring],” spirituality. As explained in Chapter 3, at the stroke of midnight on New Year’s Day, the bell at Sensō-ji (and other similar temple bells throughout Japan) are rung 108 times. It is believed, in Buddhist thought, that these strikes of the bell dispel (or at least symbolize the dissolution of) the 108 earthly desires believed to cause human suffering during the coming year. The toll of the temple bell acts as a sonic marker for the beginning of each new year at Sensō-ji.
Discography

Bibliography


